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Catholic Marriage Preparation

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled CATHOLIC MARRIAGE PREPARATION submitted by Mona-Lee Marie Brophy Feehan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Adult and Higher Education.

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Date: Oct. 5, 1995

Abstract

Across North America, the Catholic Church considers preparation for the sacrament of marriage of prime importance for the future of our Church and, in the broader vision, for society. Therefore, all couples seeking marriage in the Catholic Church are required to complete a marriage preparation program.

The purpose of this study was to explore marriage preparation programs in the Catholic Church focusing on the Archdiocese of Edmonton. Within this region, there are many varied programs presented centrally and by individual parishes. Individual program facilitators have little knowledge of other existing programs. Communication to facilitators of common themes, recommended formats, and the need, if any, for ongoing support after marriage were the purpose of this study.

By combining the teachings of the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops on marriage preparation with some assumptions from Social Exchange theory, the Church in Society theory was developed. This new theory reflects both Catholic Church marriage preparation ideals and fundamentals of relationships from Social Exchange theory. The Church in Society theory provided the framework by which a questionnaire was developed to identify the relative importance of specific themes within marriage preparation programs, format, and ongoing support after

marriage. These three areas emerged as being critical to a well-rounded, inclusive, and informational marriage preparation program.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the five most important people in my life: Sean, Ryan, Carey, Kaeli, and most especially, Kevin. Without the support, patience, love, and encouragement of these individuals, my wonderful family, I would not have been able to fulfill this personal goal. Thank-you from the bottom of my heart.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> When men and women embark on a career in their twenties or early thirties that they intend to pursue across a lifetime, they rarely assume that the next forty or fifty years will be one smooth flight from triumph to triumph. .....But when men and women embark on that journey called marriage, they tend to do so with far less realistic appreciation of the challenges and vicissitudes that await them.
> (Brandon, 1981; p.208-9)

Education plays a fundamental role in every aspect of our society. We are formally educated from a very young age in most areas which touch upon our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth. As we age, we begin to focus on specific areas of interest which may hold a future for us in careers or leisure activities. Many of us seek more information and training, attending universities, colleges and technical schools in order to acquire as much information as possible to enable us to tackle our chosen careers and enjoy our selected leisure activities with confidence and knowledge. As a result, we begin our careers and our adult lives with the assurance that accompanies a well-rounded education.

Those preparing for marriage cannot in many cases, claim the same assurance and confidence. Most engaged couples do not investigate formal marriage preparation programs or courses as a method of studying, contemplating and preparing for their lives together. In the Catholic

Church in the Edmonton Archdiocese, an area spanning Jasper to Lloydminster and Edmonton to Red Deer (see Figure 1), couples are required to complete a marriage preparation program before being married in the Church. Few couples understand or appreciate this prerequisite to their wedding ceremony and formal recognition of their marriage by the Catholic Church. This failure to understand why the Church considers it necessary and advisable to introduce an educational and experiential component to marriage preparation may result in frustration or antagonism on the part of the engaged couple. In many cases, a couple may be reluctant to enroll in these programs and this reluctance is expressed in anger towards the institution, in this case the Church, as a result of their required attendance in a marriage preparation program.

In addition, there has been, over recent decades, a perceived accentuated deterioration of the traditional family unit and a reported corrosion of married life (Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops [CCCB], 1996). In 1995, 160,256 couples were married in Canada. In the same year, there were 77,636 divorces. This number, when added to the number of marriages that ended due to the death of a spouse (95,000) would indicate a decline in the marriage rate in Canada and, subsequently, a deterioration of the traditional family unit (Marriages and Divorces, 1995).

Between the years of 1986 and 1993 in the United States, pastors in seven cities adopted a marriage policy, which they hoped would help to reduce the rate of divorce. The clergy (priests, pastors and rabbis) required a minimum marriage preparation period of four months. This preparation took the form of trained, mature couples presenting their

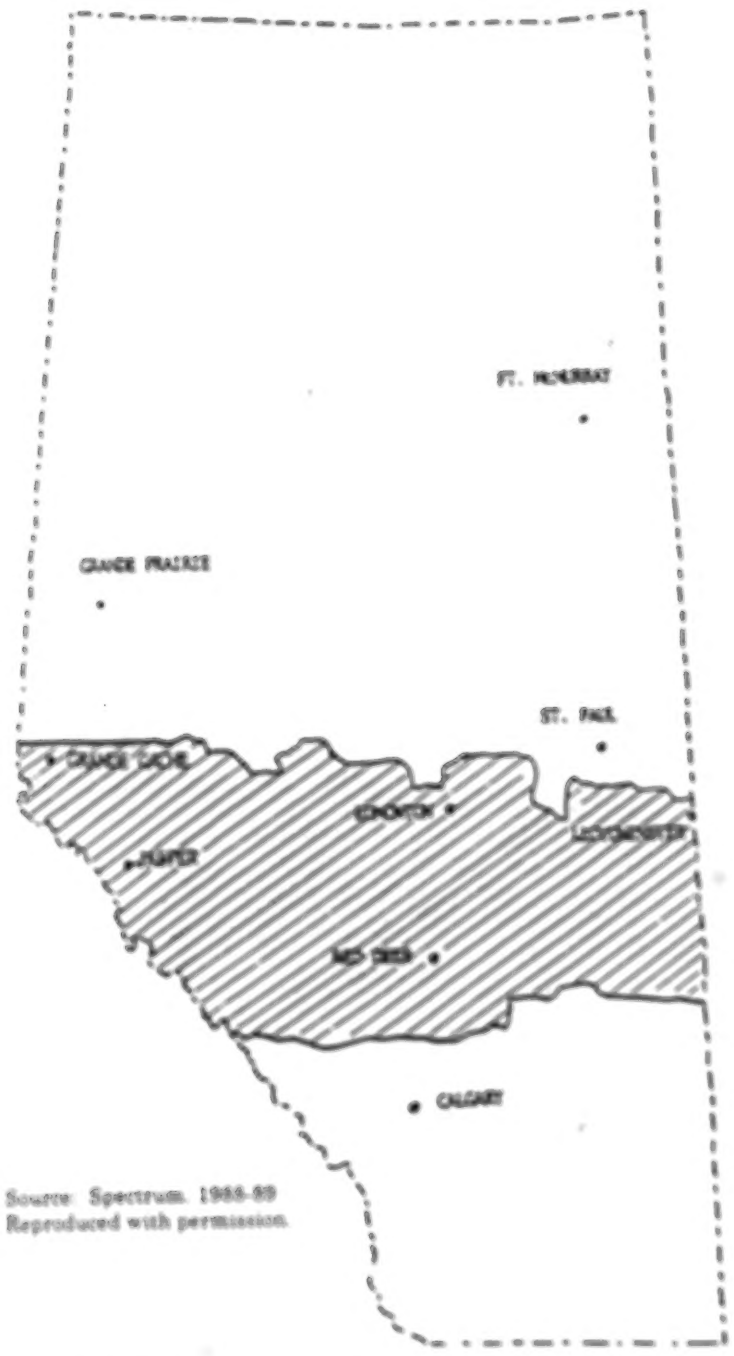

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Figure 1: Alberta Map of Edmonton Archdiocese

experiences in marriage to the couples as well as requiring couples to complete a premarital inventory. The result of this policy has been a decline of 8 to 40 percent in the divorce rates in these seven cities (Cities see divorce..., 1997).

The desire to reduce the divorce rate in combination with the desire to accomplish the goals of long-term marital success and stronger family units reinforced a determination to implement marriage preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese. The Church recognized the difficulties in requiring marriage preparation but this recognition of difficulties in implementing marriage preparation was outweighed by the hoped-for value for the future of the family and of the Catholic Church.

However, the Catholic Church in the Edmonton Archdiocese has determined that it is its goal in the sacrament of marriage to take those reasonable and practical steps which it believes will allow a greater possibility of long-term marital success and subsequently stronger family units, a goal which has been adopted by the Catholic Church in Canada (CCCB, 1996). These goals are what the Catholic Church believes become achievable as a possible outcome of preparing for marriage in a formal program of married life education. The desire to achieve these goals or to increase the possibility of these goals being achieved by married couples led the Church to its decision to require mandatory marriage preparation in 1972 (Edmonton Chancery Archives, 1997). Marriage preparation continues to be mandatory in the Edmonton Archdiocese and throughout the Catholic Church because of a perceived belief of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church (ie, the Vatican) that these goals are being accomplished or, at minimum, progress is being made towards the accomplishment of these goals through marriage preparation.

In the context of continuing mandatory marriage preparation, this study will review marriage preparation programs currently being offered centrally or by individual parishes within the Edmonton Archdiocese. The purpose of this study is to investigate themes or topics thought to be of value to young couples, suggest formats best suited to marriage preparation programs, and discern the need, if any, for ongoing support after marriage. Because individual program facilitators have little knowledge of other programs being offered, a secondary purpose of this study is to formulate recommendations for parishes and the Church in order to suggest a basis of uniformity in marriage preparation programs throughout the Archdiocese.

Marriage Preparation

Studies outside the Church have indicated a direct link between formal marriage preparation and a reduction in divorce rates (Matheson, 1977; Mion, 1974). These studies are dated and this would tend to indicate a need for more current research to bring the findings up to date. However, a study conducted at Creighton University (1995) addressed the perceived value of a marriage preparation program, administration of these programs, topics or themes that should be addressed, and Church/program satisfaction inter-relationship but did not seek to measure the relationship between formal marriage preparation and divorce rates.

Marriage preparation programs are adult educational programs. Advocates of formal marriage preparation programs believe that the time to discuss and reflect on the potential for a relationship is before the wedding, not after (Rosenfield, 1981). With the guidance and shared

experiences of married facilitators, engaged couples can explore their strengths and weaknesses, discuss compromises, and develop tools that couples can begin using to work through problem areas before the wedding and before these problems become threats to their relationship. Matheson (1977) believed that couples who examined their relationship prior to marriage reduced the likelihood of divorce. While marriage preparation is just one step in the life-long commitment to a relationship, it may be a crucial one of great benefit to a couple throughout their marriage.

There are many different marriage preparation programs in existence today. These programs or courses differ in overall length (the number of evenings or weekends required to complete the program or course), session length (the length of each evening or weekend), the themes or topics covered in each session and the suggested presentation of the course (the teaching method used) (Marriage Ministry Workshop, personal communication, January 10, 1998). Courses vary in length from requiring couples to complete one program which includes:

- Friday evening and all day Saturday
- Friday evening, all day Saturday and Sunday
- one evening a week for two to three hours with each session running anywhere from six to twelve weeks.

Some courses require both weekly sessions and one weekend session.

The themes or topics covered in these courses also vary greatly. Most courses include topics such as communication, sexuality, finances, expectations of marriage, conflict resolution, and the wedding ceremony. Other topics covered include individual differences, spirituality, religion (God in marriage, sacrament, interfaith or interdenominational marriages), intimacy, family (starting a family, parenting, extended

family, blended families), and roles in marriage. There are few common themes present in all marriage preparation programs and each program interprets the themes uniquely (Marriage Ministry Workshop, personal communication, January 10, 1998).

Presentation of the themes or topics at the course also varies, although the use of facilitating couples sharing personal experiences in their relationships appears common to the majority of marriage preparation programs. Experiential sharing followed by large and small group discussions is the most common teaching method. Most of the courses also incorporate couple dialogue which combines individual written answers to specific questions with a short period of time for the couple to discuss each others responses. This couple dialogue may or may not be followed by group discussion. Activities designed to promote a greater understanding of a specific topic are also widely used although not uniformly in every program or course. Couples in rural areas are offered correspondence courses that consist of videos on specific themes as well as written questions relating to the themes.

Even the cost associated with taking a marriage preparation program varies from one course to another. Some courses are offered for as little as $60 per couple while others are in the range of $125 to $150 per couple. These costs are applied to required supplies which include items such as books, pens and pencils, videos, refreshments, hall rentals and guest speakers. As the length of the programs and the supplies needed vary for each course, it is understandable that the cost would reflect these variances.

Definition of Terms in the Study

Several terms relating to the Catholic Church and its structure are used throughout this study. In an effort to clarify these terms, the following list, taken from "Spectrum: An Outline of the Archdiocese of Edmonton, Its History, Structure and Services" (1988-89), has been established:

Agencies and Commissions are boards or groups entrusted with the performance of a specific duty, empowered by the Archbishop and report directly to the Archbishop.

Archdiocese is one of several diocese which takes precedence over other diocese and which is led by an Archbishop.

Catholic/Catholic refers to a couple in which both partners are of the Catholic faith.

Chancery or Chancery Office is the office of the Archbishop within a Catholic Archdiocese which carries out the day-to-day business.

Church refers to the Catholic Church.

Clergy refers to ordained ministers in the Catholic Church.

Council is a gathering of persons for the purpose of consultation, deliberation, or advice.

Council of Priests is a group of priests who are responsible for advising the Archbishop of priestly and church concerns. It is also known as the Senate of Priests.

Council of Women Religious is a group of Religious Women (nuns) representing their communities by advising the Archbishop of needs, concerns, and visions regarding the people of the Church.

Diocese is a geographical area which encompasses a number of parishes which are led by a Bishop.

Encyclical refers to a Papal letter addressing a specific church teaching distributed to Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops who, in turn, relay the message to the parishes.

Evangelization is reaching out and welcoming or bringing people into the church family.

Family Enrichment Center is a commission of the Edmonton Archdiocese established in 1987 to support families within the Archdiocese by providing resources, programs, and facilitator training.

Inter-denominational, for the purposes of this study, refers to those couples where one individual is Catholic and the other is of another Christian faith.

Inter-faith refers to couples where one individual is Catholic and the other is of another faith, such as Jewish or Hindu.

Missions are small church communities that share resources (such as priests and personnel) with a larger parish. These missions usually exist in the rural areas in order to facilitate less travel for parishioners.

Region is a geographic boundary within an Archdiocese or Diocese which facilitates representation within the Edmonton Archdiocese, which has eleven regions.

Religious refers to those belonging to a religious order but are not ordained as in Sisters (nuns) or Brothers.

Synod is a gathering of delegates representing all regions within a Diocese or Archdiocese for the purpose of deliberating on matters of concern affecting the Church.

History of the Edmonton Archdiocese

In Catholic terminology, a parish is a small administrative and geographical unit which has its own church, its own priest, and operates as a contained Catholic community within the whole Church. A diocese is

a larger territorial unit comprising a number of church parishes which is led and guided by a Bishop of the Catholic Church. An Archdiocese is a diocese of the Catholic Church which is under the direction and guidance of an Archbishop and is, therefore, the seat of administrative control having precedence over surrounding diocese.

The Archdiocese of Edmonton traces its roots to 1852 when the then Diocese of the Northwest, which extended from the U.S.- Canadian border to the Arctic Ocean and from the Great Lakes to the Rockies became the Diocese of St. Boniface (Edmonton Chancery Archives, 1997). In 1871, the Diocese of St. Boniface was divided into two diocese; the western diocese became the Diocese of St. Albert. The diocese of St. Albert consisted of the District of Saskatchewan, Riviere-aux-Anglais, Cumberland, and the western portion of York (much of which is now within the province of Alberta) with a population of 5,000 Metis, 11,000 Natives and employees of the Hudson's Bay Company and their families. The St. Albert diocese was subsequently divided in 1890 separating the areas which would become the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905. In 1912, Pope Pius X raised the Diocese of St. Albert to the status of Archdiocese of Edmonton and created a new diocese for the Calgary territory, giving the Edmonton Archdiocese precedence over all other diocese in the province (Pastoral Council of the Archdiocese of Edmonton, 1988-89).

Presently, the Archdiocese of Edmonton consists of 90 parishes; 43 urban and 47 rural parishes, with 30 of these rural parishes serving 73 smaller missions. Missions are small communities that share priests, personnel and resources with the mother parish of a larger community. The Archdiocese records its members by a tally of the number of families registered in each parish as opposed to an individual count. The number

of families registered in rural and urban parishes and missions during the year 1995-96 was 54,917 families. (Families register in a parish by submitting a registration form with biographical information to the parish office). Subcategorized into rural and urban, there were 26,967 urban families and 27,950 rural families registered in the Edmonton Archdiocese (Annual Statistical Parish Report, 1996).

The administrative structure of the Archdiocese is led by the Archbishop, the representative of Rome, as its central figure (see Figure 2). The Archdiocese utilizes its commissions and chancery office as well as the Council of Priests and the Council of Women Religious as the vehicles to relay messages and directives from Rome, from the Canadian Church, and from within the Archdiocese, to the people of the Archdiocese. These messages and directives are relayed to regions within the Archdiocese, down to the parishes who in turn inform the people. Within the Archdiocese there exist many agencies, commissions, institutes, services and organizations to serve the needs of the people of the Archdiocese and the larger community. Although most of these groups have their own governing boards, they exist under the tutelage of, and are responsible to, the Archbishop (see Figure 3).

Creation of the Family Enrichment Center

In 1972, the Edmonton Archdiocese was the first in Canada to make marriage preparation programs mandatory for couples where one or both of the partners was under the age of nineteen (Edmonton Chancery Archives, 1997). The following year, a special gathering of priests within the Archdiocese (called the Council or Senate of Priests) concluded that more support for families was needed at the Archdiocesan level with

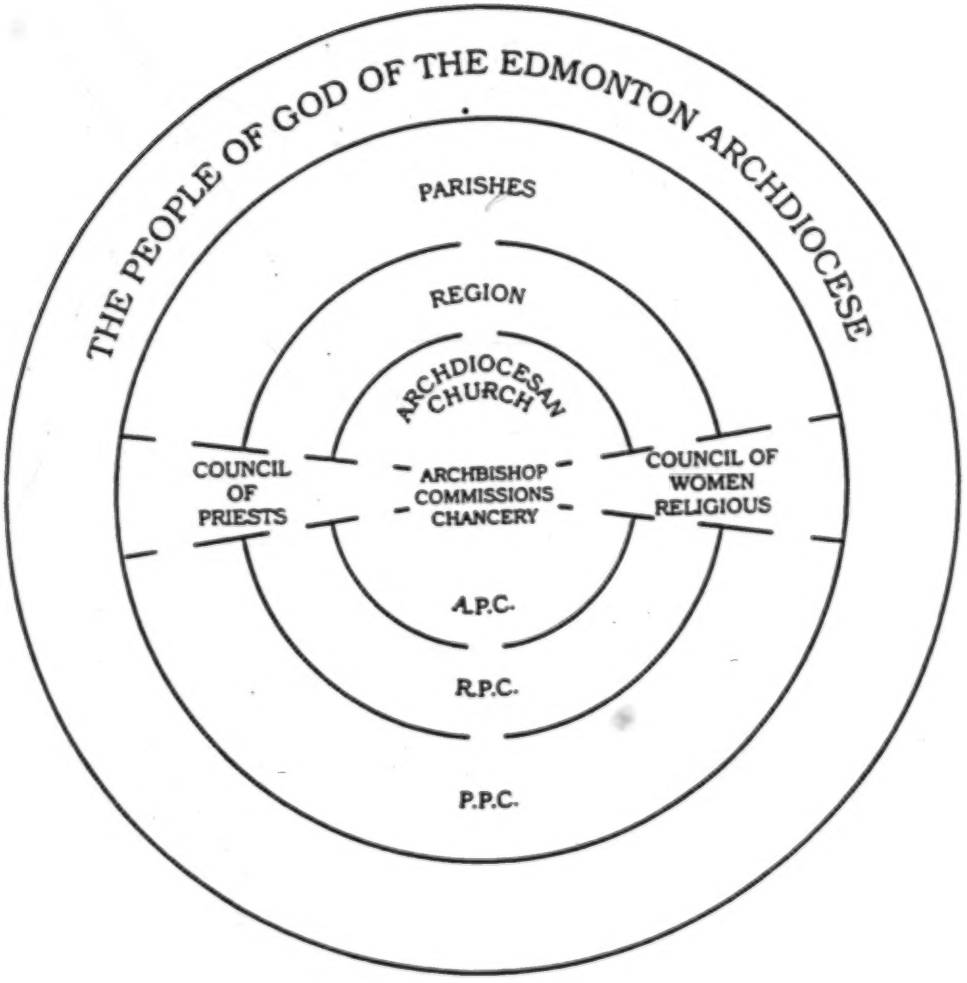

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Figure 2: People of Edmonton Archdiocese

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Figure 3: Organization of the Archdiocese

special focus on marriage preparation. Through the Catholic Information Center, a central office established to provide information on matters pertaining to the Catholic Church, an advisory committee for the ministry to the engaged was formed in 1984. This advisory committee saw marriage preparation as preparing couples for more than just the engagement period, and the development of the "Ministry to the Engaged and Newlyweds" became the responsibility in 1987 of a newly formed office entitled the Family Enrichment Center ("History of," 1992). The Family Enrichment Center was established to offer a central marriage preparation program for parishes lacking the resources to present their own programs. It became the responsibility of the Center to produce a manual for marriage preparation programs, train facilitators for parishes wishing to operate their own programs, arrange meetings for those involved in this ministry throughout the Archdiocese, and to act as a referral service.

Currently, the purpose of the Family Enrichment Center has broadened considerably. It is now given the responsibility to strengthen and support Christian family living, based on the Gospel values of faith, charity, justice, peace, understanding, respect, work and joy. The Family Enrichment Center provides educational and informational programs and services for Catholic families through all stages of family life. It achieves its purpose through coordinating existing groups in the Archdiocese concerned with family life, developing programs on both the parish and Archdiocesan level that promote the building of Christian families, offering leadership training for volunteers, and providing information on available services and materials addressing the values of Christian family living (FEC, 1988).

Synod on the Family

In 1993, the Archbishop of Edmonton announced the beginning of a Synod within the Archdiocese. A synod is a gathering of the laity, clergy and religious for the purpose of assisting the Archbishop to determine future directions on a selected theme. The Synod process included five stages: the development of a theme, small community discussion groups, a large community gathering, the development of recommendations, and implementation of the recommendations.

For the first stage, a questionnaire was distributed at one specific Sunday mass celebration in all parishes asking Catholics of the Archdiocese to decide on a theme. The results were tabulated by the Synod Office, a small core group of individuals hired to guide the Synod process. It was clear upon examination of recommended themes that there was a need to discuss issues of concern to the family. Thus, it was determined the subject of the Synod would be family life.

The second stage, consisted of distributing three information packages, (which included videos, articles, readings and sets of questions), to small neighbourhood groups or small faith communities within each parish. Each information package was designed to stimulate discussion and delineate areas of concern. These small faith communities were asked to submit their thoughts, concerns and reactions to the information packages to the Synod Office. This stage required over two years to complete.

The results of the discussions of the small faith communities in the second stage were tabulated and presented to a large group gathering of delegates representing the regions, parishes and committees of the

Archdiocese late in 1995. This large gathering, stage three, entitled the Synod Assembly, was a four-day conference with over 200 delegates chosen by parishes, commissions and agencies representing clergy, religious and laity. It was responsible for addressing the concerns and inquiries of the small faith communities and presenting recommendations to the Archbishop.

The fourth stage involved a small committee charged with the responsibility of reviewing and organizing the recommendations of the Synod Assembly and drafting the final recommendations document (Synod on the Family, 1995). This recommendations document was transferred to an Implementation Committee, whose work would fulfill stage five of the Synod process. As of this writing, the Implementation Committee continues to work towards the goal of addressing the recommendations.

Several of these Synod recommendations underlined the importance of marriage preparation. The first goal of the Synod recommendations was to renew the commitment of the people of the Archdiocese to support and strengthen family life in all its diversity, by strengthening marriages, supporting single parents, affirming marriage preparation, encouraging family-based spirituality, re-stating respect for life, inviting family participation in the liturgy and building parish community. In the area of marriage preparation, the Synod recommended that:

- marriage preparation be offered as early as possible in the couple's engagement
- parishes not currently offering a marriage preparation program be encouraged to do so themselves or in conjunction with other parishes

- the Family Enrichment Center continue their marriage preparation programs
- parishes explore means to continue to support couples during and after marriage preparation.

These recommendations arising out of the Synod process appear to be repeated in responses to this study. As will be evident in Chapter Five, the conclusions to this study reflect back to and support these Synod recommendations.

This emphasis was further supported by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops who prepared a document entitled "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage" (1996) in which the Bishops addressed the position of the Catholic Church on marriage preparation. They recognized a serious need to provide engaged couples with information to help them meet the challenges of married life. As the Church saw this program benefiting future marriages and families, a high priority was to be given to the development of marriage preparation programs. Although this recognition was expressed by the Council of Bishops and the Synod, either body did not propose a definitive and detailed program. It became the responsibility of individual Catholic diocese to develop specific programs.

Over the last decade, anticipating and following upon the recommendations of the Council of Bishops and Edmonton Archdiocesan Synod, diocese and parishes in the Edmonton area and across Canada have adopted mandatory marriage preparation programs in hopes of supporting the future of relationships and families.

Marriage Preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese

Early Programs

The Edmonton Archdiocese, being the first diocese in Canada to require marriage preparation over 25 years ago, has had many successful programs operating throughout the Edmonton region. However, through investigation, it appears that many diverse programs exist at the Archdiocesan and parish levels, and that some individual parishes are unaware of other programs in use throughout the Archdiocese (Marriage Ministry Workshop, personal communication, January, 1998).

The first documentation of a parish marriage preparation program offered in the Archdiocese of Edmonton was provided through a central office, then called the Catholic Information Center, and was dated 1949 (Limoges, 1948). This program was presented at St. Mary's High School in Edmonton (now Ecole J. H. Picard) from January to March and included such themes as married love, chastity, parenthood and finances. The establishment of this course was in response to an encyclical on Christian Marriage by Pope Pius XII in the late 1940s directing diocese and parishes to begin preparing couples for the sacrament of marriage. Those couples unable to attend this central course were, in most cases, prepared by individual interview by the parish priest or staff worker. Between 1957 and 1967, over 5,000 couples had completed a marriage preparation course within the Archdiocese (Edmonton Chancery Archives, 1997).

In 1972, the Archdiocese of Edmonton was the first diocese in Canada to require a marriage preparation course for those engaged couples where one or both of the partners were under the age of nineteen.

However, as time went on, more parish priests saw the potential of marriage preparation and began to require that all couples contemplating marriage should have some form of preparation. As the number of requests grew, it became increasingly obvious that courses with an attendance of over one hundred couples were seemingly not as effective as programs with fewer registrants which afforded a greater opportunity for facilitators to connect with each couple. Individual parishes began looking into preparation exclusively for couples being married in their own particular parish. The Archdiocese recognized the value in smaller classes and encouraged the parishes to adopt this practice. Not all parishes had the resources to begin their own program and some of the rural and smaller parishes, having only two or three marriages a year, believed their resources could be used more efficiently and favored entrusting their couples to the Archdiocesan program. As a result, there remained a strong need for a centralized program.

As individual parishes began to take responsibility for their own marriage preparation programs, the demand for new programs began to grow (McCord, 1997). In the 1980s and 1990s, many different programs were developed across Canada and the United States to meet this growing demand. As these programs were relatively new, assessment and evaluation during the development process and after implementation were minimal. Individual parishes, therefore, initially adopted programs in whole or in part that they presumed would best suit the needs of its couples. Over time, these programs were adapted and modified to meet the unique needs of each parish and their participants. As discussed earlier, the Edmonton Archdiocese has a variety of programs, almost as many in number as the parishes and individual groups presenting those programs. Although there are common elements and themes in many of these programs, virtually no two programs in the Edmonton Archdiocese

today are the same. Each parish and marriage preparation group offers a unique marriage preparation program.

A survey was conducted in 1986 in an attempt to assess the status of marriage preparation within the Archdiocese at that time. The information gathered indicated that most parishes used the central marriage preparation program, although some parishes requested the help of the Family Enrichment Center to begin their own program. The 1986 survey was used to make some modifications to the program offered by the Family Enrichment Center but was not utilized to introduce consistency or commonality among parish programs or between the central program and parish programs. The survey, while helpful to assist in modifying the central program, was not extended to the wider goals of examining all programs in the Archdiocese, looking for common themes and topics, or making recommendations for changes in the broader area of marriage preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese. As a result of this evolution of marriage preparation programs, the Archdiocese no longer has a uniform program.

Current Marriage Preparation Programs

Many different marriage preparation programs are currently offered in the Edmonton Archdiocese. Two of these programs are offered at the Family Enrichment Center; the Archdiocesan marriage preparation program and the Enriched program. The latter is designed to address the specific needs of older couples, couples entering second marriages, and couples with children. The Archdiocesan marriage preparation program combines four evening sessions and one weekend session. This program addresses such themes as dispelling fears, conflict resolution, family violence, inter-faith and inter-church marriages, and

uses large and small group presentations and discussion. The Enriched program originated from the Archdiocesan program and consists of one evening and one weekend session. This program differs from the Archdiocesan program in that it is intended for those with more life experience in age, previous marriage, or bringing children into the marriage. The focus of this program is the learning and practicing of concrete tools for communication and conflict resolution (Merrick, personal communication, November, 1997). These programs were developed by the Family Enrichment Center in the late 1980s based upon the Center's contact with engaged couples, feedback from the couples, and the expertise of the facilitators working with marriage preparation (Family Enrichment Center Board Minutes, 1991).

A third program, Engaged Encounter, is an international marriage preparation program which is uniform throughout the world; that is, the outline, format, presentation and themes are the same whether the course is presented in Alaska, Alberta or Europe. This program, being a residential weekend format, provides the couple with an intense agenda with themes that include marriage in today's society, communication, spirituality, sacrament and sexuality.

Pre-marriage inventories such as FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study) and Prepare are self-diagnostic instruments designed to guide couples in the discovery of themselves as individuals and as a couple (Markey and Micheletto, 1997). These inventories were developed in response to a growing demand by those working within the field of marriage preparation for an instrument that would encourage couples to evaluate their relationship and provide them with an opportunity to address their strengths and weaknesses with a trained facilitator. They consist of a series of statements to which

the couple responds independently on individual computer sheets. A computer program processes these sheets and the results are presented to the couple at a subsequent meeting. With the guidance of a trained facilitator, couples can enter a dialogue that may lead to better understanding and communicating of who they are as individuals and as a couple. Facilitators believe these inventories challenge the couple to address many different aspects of their relationship and can provide direction for the future of their relationship (Markey, Micheletto and Becker, 1990). These inventories are used in conjunction with other marriage preparation programs in larger parishes and as the marriage preparation program in some smaller parishes.

The majority of parishes utilize the programs provided by the Family Enrichment Center, Engaged Encounter, pre-marriage inventories (Prepare or FOCCUS) or a combination. Of those parishes in the Edmonton Archdiocese responding in this study, over 60% use one or more of these programs rather than offer a program in their own parish.

Parish marriage preparation programs are most often unique to the parish. These programs were primarily fashioned after a specific course but evolved over time in order to meet the unique needs of the parish and its engaged couples. Within the Edmonton Archdiocese, most parishes presenting their own marriage preparation programs have adapted the structure and content used in "Evenings for the Engaged" a weekly evening program developed by "Engaged Encounter" with similar themes. This program has been adapted and modified by seven parishes in the Archdiocese. Each of these programs is unique to the parish with sometimes only a vague similarity to the original "Evenings for the Engaged."

However, the basic themes in the "Evenings for the Engaged" program of communication, spirituality, sacrament and sexuality are present, along with other themes. The adapted parish programs utilize the "Evenings for the Engaged" version of the couple dialogue technique of answering questions and reacting to statements individually, couples exchanging their responses, and discussing what each has written. As the response of engaged couples and marriage preparation facilitators has been exceedingly positive in regard to pre-marriage inventories, more parishes are adopting the use of Prepare or FOCCUS as a supplement to their parish programs, although some parishes, due to the small number of marriages within the parish, use the inventory as the sole means of marriage preparation.

The Red Deer region has developed a marriage preparation program which serves the needs of engaged couples in the southern region of the Edmonton Archdiocese. This program entitled "A Catholic Perspective" is a compilation of several sources and supplements the local Social Services program, "Beginnings." The Social Services program focuses on the couple with a strong emphasis on communication and financial planning. "A Catholic Perspective" was designed to address themes relating to the Catholic Church, such as sacrament, spirituality and the marriage liturgy. Suggesting that engaged couples enroll in both courses broadens the scope of themes presented, although only one quarter of those preparing for marriage in the Red Deer region take both programs (D. Acheson, D. Bouchard, personal communication, January 30-31, 1998).

Another program that has been adopted and subsequently adapted to a unique parish program is the program developed by Novalis, a Catholic publishing company. This program, "When a Couple Marries,"

(1990) originally a six-evening program, has been expanded by parishes in St. Albert into an eight-session program with married couples sponsoring engaged couples and working through the program together. Some of the themes addressed are natural family planning, financial and legal concerns, personal identities and ceremony preparation. This program, along with other programs in the Archdiocese, culminates in a celebration involving the couples, the facilitators and the Church community.

There are common themes within the marriage preparation programs being offered in the Edmonton Archdiocese. The most prevalent theme, present in over 90% of the programs surveyed for this research, was communication. Other themes offered for examination and discussion in the majority of programs (over 60%) were expectations of marriage, sexuality, the sacrament of marriage, knowing my partner and myself, and conflict resolution (including anger management, problems in marriage, and marital or family violence). Half of the programs included themes such as financial planning, spirituality, and planning the wedding ceremony. The remaining themes, including intimacy, legal issues, defining love, theology of marriage, God in marriage, roles in marriage, leisure activities, starting a family, parenting and blended families, Bible study, and extended family occurred in less than 30% of the programs within the Edmonton Archdiocese. No one theme was present in all programs being offered.

Research Study

No further investigation of marriage preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese, on a formalized basis, has occurred since 1986. No investigation has attempted, since the beginning of marriage preparation

courses in the Archdiocese in 1949, to collect information from all providers of marriage preparation programs (whether at the parish or Archdiocesan level), to evaluate commonalities and differences in those programs, or to establish recommendations for programs at both the parish and Archdiocesan level.

The purpose of this study was to identify what preparation is currently offered and what themes/topics are important for marriage preparation programs. Also, the study explored what format would be best suited to the needs of the couples and whether there exists a perceived need to provide ongoing support after marriage.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter investigated marriage preparation as adult education, discussed the perceived advantages enjoyed by couples who have formally prepared for marriage, touched upon the variety and availability of marriage preparation programs, briefly reviewed the history of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, the creation of the Family Enrichment Center, the Synod on the Family, and a history of marriage preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese.

Chapter II presents a review of literature relevant to this study organized into four sections. Section one explores academic commentary on marriage preparation. Section two investigates the involvement of the Catholic Church and society in marriage preparation and the theoretical development utilized. Section three addresses development of a theory that combines Church and secular components. Section four outlines

programs currently in use in the Archdiocese as well as other contemporary marriage preparation programs.

Chapter III outlines the research methodology in the study. Chapter IV includes presentation of the data based upon the processes set out in Chapter III. Discussion of responses to open-ended questions concludes this chapter.

Chapter V presents a summary, discussion and recommendations based upon the analysis set out in Chapter IV. The results of this study will be made available to parishes and groups offering marriage preparation programs to provide for them, the opportunity to revisit and revise their programs based upon this review and analysis.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature relevant to the topic of marriage preparation and this thesis is comprised of four segments. The first segment presents an academic commentary. This segment reviews current research and opinions of marriage preparation. The second segment focuses on the topic of marriage preparation as it relates to the Catholic Church and in the broader context of society. The information from this segment is presented to explore the Catholic Church's involvement in marriage preparation and to develop the foundation for a theoretical framework. The third segment addresses theory development combining Church and secular components. The final segment explores current marriage preparation programs in use throughout the Archdiocese and investigates the themes included in these programs.

Academic Commentary on Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation has been in existence for more than half a century in the Edmonton Archdiocese. It is difficult to identify the origins of marriage preparation as a formal program in North America or Europe as there has been little written specifically about this area as compared to other relationship-related subject areas (Larson and Holman, 1995). It has, however, been recognized as being a valid and important program by researchers who believe that marriage preparation can strengthen and support marriage relationships (Duncan, Box and Silliman, 1996; Russell and Farnden, 1992; Tiesel and Olsen, 1992). It is viewed as a tool by which couples may investigate the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship before marriage.

Interest in the area of marriage preparation has been increasing over the past two decades. However, very few large scale studies have been undertaken and those studies that have been completed are most often based upon small and select samples within specific regions, thereby limiting generalizations to the greater population (Russell and Farnden, 1992). There is clearly a need for empirical data on a broad population base, not simply limited to couples actually involved in marriage preparation programs in order to understand the larger picture both from the perspective of those entering marriage with their expectations as well as those who have the lived experience of marriage. This will enable proper evaluation and measurement of the efficacy and effect of these programs at a time when they are becoming more popular with couples and more required by Church groups (Johnson, 1995).

Of the studies and observations of marriage preparation programs currently available, most identify themes or topics that the sample population describe as being important to consider in these programs. A common theme that arises in most studies is communication. Communication is viewed as a strong contributor to marital quality, whether it is positive or negative (Burleson and Denton, 1997; Heavey and Larson, 1996; Houck and Daniel, 1994; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 1998). Couples experiencing problems in their communication often experience difficulty in their relationship and this difficulty may cause irreparable damage. When marriage preparation addresses communication in a formal program, it is hypothesized that couples take with them into the marriage, communication tools which may prevent misunderstandings and provide a stronger foundation for the relationship (Boisvert, 1995).

Although communication was the theme most prevalent in researching content of marriage preparation programs, it was not the only theme presented. Other themes such as the arrival of the first child, parenting, sharing feelings, expectations of marriage, shared goals, sexuality, conflict resolution, and religion were also cited as themes which could be of benefit to couples contemplating marriage (Boisvert, 1995; Houck and Daniel, 1994; Russell and Farnden, 1992; Whetstone, 1996). Expectations of marriage, sharing feelings, shared goals, sexuality, conflict resolution, and religion require a deeper connection between two individuals who plan to share their lives together in contrast with the level of connection between individuals who may or may not be associated over a long period of time as friends. The themes of arrival of the first child and parenting reflect life-changing experiences that call for a deeper understanding of evolving and expanding relationships. By addressing these themes in marriage preparation, programs can provide the opportunity for couples to explore their understandings and feelings and may be better prepared to affect necessary adaptations in their communication and relationship.

There are many programs and inventories, incorporating various combinations of these themes or topics, that are available to facilitators of marriage preparation programs. It is important that facilitators investigate the various programs and adopt, and in some cases, adapt the chosen program to fit the priorities set in their region. This will enable facilitators to deliver a program that meets the needs of the couples and, as in the case of the Catholic Church, the requirements of the Church (Larson and Holman, 1995).

As the emphasis of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church has been on the content of these programs, little investigation has been

conducted into the administrative aspect. Several American studies have focused some attention on this less subject-substantive, but nonetheless important, aspect of marriage preparation programs. Mary Russell and Rosanne Farnden (1992) examined couples' satisfaction level with marriage preparation programs and included in their study an evaluation and discussion of program delivery factors. Program content, mode of presentation, utilization of exercises, and timing were factors that were examined although the researchers found these themes could benefit from further investigation if program planners are to develop an optimum marriage preparation program. No study has addressed specifically the time and format needs of these programs. However, by investigating the needs of the couples in regard to these and other factors such as price, place, travel distance, and title, marriage preparation programs may become more attractive to the couples it hopes to serve (Duncan, Box and Silliman, 1996).

The largest promoters of and believers in marriage preparation programs are currently the established Churches. They have the administrative structure, resources, and stake in marriage outcome so as to make these groups natural facilitators of such programs. Couples still largely wish to have marriage ceremonies within a church building, officiated by clergy and surrounded by a church community. Subject to denominational restrictions, anyone can rent a church for such a ceremony, but it is the responsibility of the church community to ensure that the Church has a greater and more lasting involvement in the marriage relationship than merely staging the wedding production (Johnson, 1995).

In examining the role of Churches in marriage outcome, the intended result is to bind couples entering into marriage in a healthy,

happy, and long-lasting relationship which will withstand the tests of adversity and time. To achieve that result, it is incumbent upon church groups to provide more preparation and support for couples before they enter marriage (Gleick, 1995). It is also important that these church groups design marriage preparation programs and content which take into account and focus upon the needs and expectations of the couples, rather than being centered too strongly upon the needs and expectations of the Church (Boisvert, 1995). Increasingly, church groups have begun to work in a coordinated fashion, both intrachurch and interchurch, toward making the success of marriage a significant priority (Johnson, 1995).

If formal marriage preparation is to be of maximum assistance to couples in fully examining and exploring their relationship, assisting them in developing healthy communication and inter-relationship skills, and preparing adequately for a stable and durable partnership, this support must be present throughout the engagement and continue, in an acceptable format, throughout the entirety of the marriage (Tiesel and Olsen, 1992; Gleick, 1995). Increasing attention must be paid to the changing character of and trends in marriage, and churches in the future would be well-advised to direct greater attention to ongoing support to couples adapting to these changes after their wedding (McCloskey, 1993).

Another continually changing aspect of marriage to be addressed at the preparation stage is the fluctuating roles of females and males. What it means to be a female or a male in a marriage relationship has undergone rapid and radical revision since the Second World War (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm and Steinmetz, 1993). Gender role relationships change within an individual marriage as a result of the interaction of the couple itself and between the couple and their environment. It is essential in maintaining a current relationship that

this continual change of the female/male roles be recognized by the couple (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 1998). Married couples must increase their awareness of differences between males and females if they are to understand and benefit from the differential strengths and limitations of each (Tiesel and Olsen, 1992).

One area of pronounced difference between males and females is also the fundamental theme of many marriage preparation programs; communication. It is postulated that females and males communicate differently, with divergent emphasis on the many aspects of communication. Many females value the emotional quality of their communication with their partner while many males rely upon their communication for more concrete results. One may be relationship-oriented and the other may be result-oriented (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 1998). Overall, females report being less satisfied with the level and depth of communication with their partners than do males (Houck, 1994). Such divergences in male and female perceptions are fertile ground for marriage preparation and continuing marriage enrichment.

Overall, academic commentary on marriage preparation emphasizes that such preparation is instrumental in strengthening and supporting the marriage relationship. There is need for more empirical research into the benefits and results of marriage preparation at a time of increasing interest in these programs. One dominant theme in preparing for marriage and in strengthening marriage relationships is communication. Communication is viewed as a strong contributor to marital quality, the basis of a strong foundation for a lasting relationship, and a major difference between the female and male partners in a marriage relationship. There is a recognized need for more study into the

administrative aspects of marriage preparation programs, particularly as facilitated by church groups which are heavily involved in these programs. There is also a growing recognition that marriage preparation must not be limited to pre-marriage involvement but must extend to support for marriages throughout the relationship, maximizing the benefits to both partners in their relationship, optimizing their strengths, and recognizing their limitations.

Marriage Preparation, the Catholic Church and Society

The following quote from "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (CCCB, 1994) exemplifies the Catholic Church's stand and the importance it places on marriage preparation:

> Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial *order*, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children. Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses). The public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.
> So that the "I do" of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, *preparation for marriage* is of prime importance.
> The example and teaching given by parents and families remain the special form of this preparation.
> The role of pastors and of the Christian community as the "family of God" is indispensable for the transmission of the human and Christian values of marriage and family, and much more so in our era when many young people experience broken homes which no longer sufficiently assure this initiation:
>
> > 'It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role and its exercise, so that, having learned the value of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to engage in honourable courtship and enter upon a marriage of their own.'
> > (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994, p. 346-7)

This excerpt characterizes the Catholic Church's belief of the need for marriage preparation. Because the Church sees marriage as the primary social institution and as a holy vocation within the Church, it has a large stake in marriages. Thus, it has taken a strong position of working toward the education of engaged couples and in doing so, providing an opportunity for evangelization or welcoming, and for couples to experience or re-experience the Church.

The Church is concerned about the future of family life and marriage relationships and believes that by assisting in the preparation for marriage, it is supporting a more healthy future for families (Simons and Harris, 1994). "The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by God with its own proper laws..... God is the author of marriage" (CCCB, 1994, p. 341). Marriage is an integral part of the Catholic Church. The Church recognizes the importance of healthy marriages to the future of the Church and to society as well. "The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life" (CCCB, 1994, p. 341).

Family values and attitudes are strongly influenced by prior educational experiences (Eastman, 1994) and pre-marriage education can promote the development of stronger marriage relationships and healthier family units (Simons and Harris, 1994). Talking about beliefs and expectations before the wedding provides a foundation on which to build a relationship, thereby giving the relationship a greater chance of handling the inevitable conflicts that arise by the formation of such an intimate relationship as marriage (Gottman, 1994).

It would seem logical that by formally preparing for marriage, we create the possibility of stronger marriages, families and communities. For example, in the United Kingdom, a bill is before Parliament addressing, primarily, new provisions for ending a marriage ("Family Law Bill," 1997). However, this document includes mention of the importance of prevention of marriage break-up in the form of marriage counseling and marriage preparation ("Marriage Interdepartmental," 1996). The bill states that the government should be committed to supporting marriages and protecting families. The Cardinal and Bishops of the United Kingdom responded to this bill by supporting reform of the grounds for divorce and emphasizing the need for better marriage preparation. They stressed that providing a means of strengthening existing marriages and providing sound marriage preparation is more crucial to healthy families than outlining the matter of "fault" as it relates to divorce ("Family Law Bill," 1997). The government, in turn, responded by agreeing that these vital needs must be met.

This idea of marriage preparation enhancing marriages is supported by Burnard and Kemp, (1994). They recommend that pre-marriage and marriage education should be a continuous process if society is to achieve and maintain strong and stable marriages. This should begin before the wedding in the form of marriage preparation (Burnard and Kemp, 1994).

The Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska conducted a study of marriage preparation in the United States in 1995. One finding indicated a strong need for marriage preparation. However, the study further emphasized that not just any marriage preparation program will serve the best interests of engaged couples. Richard McCord (1997), in his article on the Creighton

University study of marriage preparation noted that the program best suited for couples marrying in the Catholic Church is one led by a team comprised of clergy, lay couples and parish staff. According to the study, this was the combination for which respondents perceived the value of the program as being the highest.

Themes addressed in marriage preparation programs seen as most beneficial by the respondents to the Creighton study were dubbed "the five C's" ("Effective marriage," 1995). The five C's referred to communication, commitment, conflict resolution, children and church. Addressing these topics was seen as crucial to the early development of a healthy relationship. The topic of career, with a special emphasis on dual careers, was perceived as less helpful to engaged couples. The study also reported a need for the Catholic Church and its communities to communicate a broader message through marriage preparation. This broader message should encompass the development of effective marriage preparation programs as well as the message of welcoming and caring for engaged couples by the Church (this broad theme is addressed in the next section).

The previous discussion emphasizes, both with respect to marriage preparation in the Catholic Church and in the broader social context, the importance of adequate and properly structured preparation for healthy, happy and successful marriages. This discussion addresses not only the need for marriage preparation but the need for well-structured, well-designed programs which review the critical building blocks of marriage before the wedding. A solid foundation upon which the marriage structure is built ensures the strength and integrity of that structure.

Theory Framework

Theory is a guide which researchers use to reflect on the roots of their fields of study. Framing a topic around a specific theory enables the researcher to define direction and narrow the scope of the questions to be asked. It assists in maintaining a focus in providing the guidelines and boundaries within which the researcher can remain (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm and Steinmetz, 1993). However, researchers are not bound by a single theory. Many utilize more than one theory in an attempt to broaden the boundaries of their project, but the purpose of theory in guiding the research remains the same.

The Catholic Church has provided for its members many guidelines which help to delineate their beliefs and differentiate them from other faiths. These guidelines or doctrines could be considered the theory under which Catholics frame their beliefs and choose their faith life-paths. The doctrines have provided guidance for moral, ethical, spiritual and temporal growth and in most situations, allow followers choice in their decisions.

Marriage preparation has, in recent years, been receiving a great amount of attention from the Catholic Church. In 1996, a document entitled "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage" was prepared by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) for the purpose of providing a doctrine or theory that would inform its members of the expectations of the Church with regard to marriage preparation. However, as marriage is an integral component of both religious and secular society, it is important to investigate a secular theoretical framework in addition to those guidelines as proposed in the CCCB document on marriage preparation. This is important because by

combining the doctrines of the Catholic Church with a secular theory of relationships, a theory could be developed that would encompass a broader spectrum and, therefore, a more inclusive theory under which an examination of marriage preparation could be conducted.

The secular theory used in this research is the Social Exchange theory. This theory postulates that interactions between individuals are characterized by exchanges. These exchanges may be economic, social or social-psychological. The Social Exchange theory is one of the most widely used frameworks in family research (Boss et al, 1993). It has been used to explain the processes of relationship formation, courtship and mate selection, stable marital relationships, parent/child relationships, fertility decisions, divorce, women's work-role satisfaction, and the status of the elderly. Broadly defined, social exchange addresses how relationships develop, how they are lived, the patterns within the relationships, the dynamics which forge and change those relationships and the factors which determine the stability of those relationships. It addresses the issues of power, dependency, reciprocity, decision-making, dominance, control, and balance within a relationship.

Some theorists explain the balance of human exchange on an economic style cost-benefit analysis (Blau, 1964), on an individualistic model measuring personal interactions (Homans and Schneider, 1955), or on the influence of cultural norms or patterns of social organization (Levi-Strauss, 1969). For example, Blau's explanation defines social exchange as being actions that are dependent on positive reactions of others. Homans and Schneider theorize that individuals learn and reproduce behaviours that are positively rewarded, eliminate behaviours which produce negative reactions, continually modifying their behaviours to produce more positive feedback. Finally, Levi-Strauss believed that

societal norms, values and expectations are fundamental in determining human behaviour, not only in a direct relationship, but also through indirect networks of social interaction.

More recently, Richard Emerson (1976) contributed to the theory by explaining how complex social patterns revolve around dependence, power and balance in exchanges. Emerson focuses in his explanation not on the individuals within the relationship but on the form and changes in the interpersonal relationship itself.

The Social Exchange theory thus looks at relationships by examining the interpersonal exchanges that occur within the relationship from economic, psychological, sociological and social psychological perspectives. For the purposes of this study, the Social Exchange theory is useful because of its emphasis on the secular definition and development of the marriage relationship. It does not address the spiritual relationship between a couple, their church, or their God. It, therefore, focuses on an aspect of the marriage relationship that was not explored in the CCCB document on marriage preparation.

Although this research will deal solely with the Social Exchange theory in combination with the CCCB document, it is in no way an indication that it is the only theory that could be applied. However, it appears to be the most appropriate for this study.

Themes included in a Catholic marriage preparation program must, by definition, incorporate the views of the Church (the CCCB document) and the secular world if the program is to address the perceived spiritual, emotional and social needs of those participating in the program. Figure 4

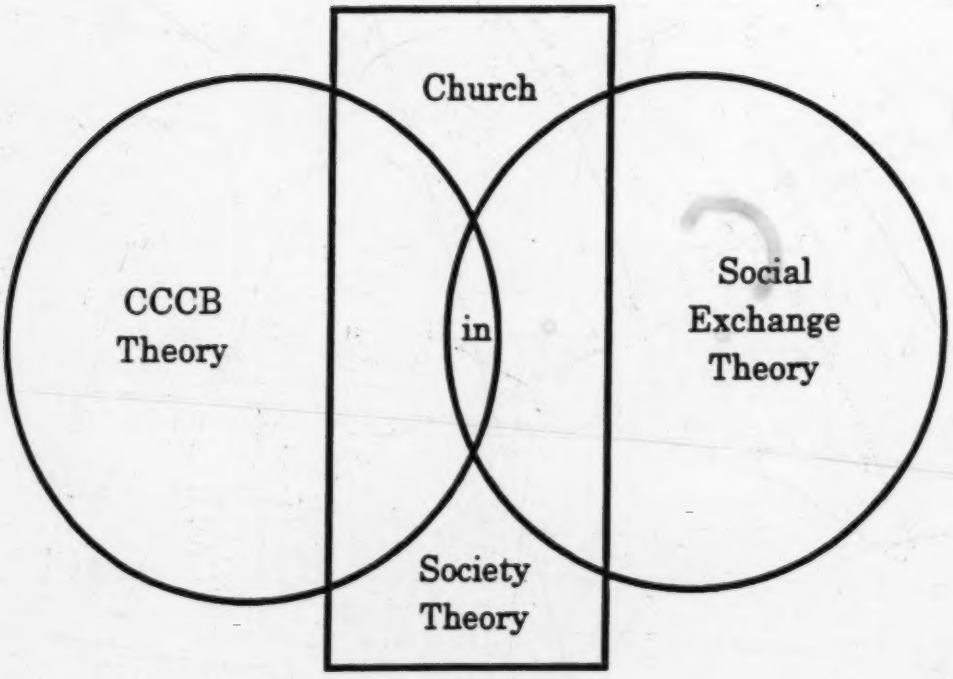

Figure 4: Conceptualization of the Theoretical Framework

visualizes assumptions taken from the CCCB document and the Social Exchange theory, combining these selected assumptions into a new theoretical approach, the Church in Society theory. The Church in Society theory both provides guidelines for and is reinforced by the results of this study. However, it may in fact be more useful in directing subsequent program development.

The CCCB Document on Marriage Preparation

The CCCB document subdivides marriage preparation into three stages or periods: remote, proximate and immediate preparation (see Figure 5). Each of these three stages has within it, assumptions on which the doctrine is based. By accepting these assumptions as part of the theory, a researcher can develop a marriage preparation program which follows closely the writings contained within this document.

The remote preparation cited in the document refers to the family preparation of children and adolescents in social and interpersonal values. The major assumption in this stage or period is that all families within the Catholic Church will teach their children the difference between what is considered right and wrong within the context of the Church. This assumption suggests that children in Catholic homes grow up with strong family support and distinct guidelines on how to live a Christian life. "Remote preparation will have achieved its main goals if it succeeds in instilling the essentials for acquiring more and more the parameters of a right judgment regarding the hierarchy of values needed in choosing the best that society has to offer ..." (CCCB, 1996, p.15). This remote preparation provides children and adolescents with background faith knowledge and ongoing faith development.

The second stage of marriage preparation is the proximate preparation. This is defined by the period of the presumed formal engagement. The document outlines the necessity of providing strong faith development and the importance of evangelization (or welcoming) couples to the Church. In this stage, the document suggests that instruction relate to interpersonal relationships, prayer, and spirituality, providing a "multifaceted and harmonious preparation" (CCCB, 1996, p. 21) which the Church believes necessary for couples to understand their roles in marriage. The assumption in this stage appears to be that all individuals seeking to be married in the Catholic Church have strong faith backgrounds, religious commitment and view marriage as a spiritual journey in which their faith and religion play a major role.

Immediate preparation is the third stage in this doctrine. It is comprised of four elements: evaluation and updating of previous preparation, prayer experiences, liturgical preparation (with special attention given to the sacraments), and personal interviews with the clergy. It is envisioned that this stage will be the culmination of a journey that began with the family preparation of young children. Stage three assumes that the individuals have successfully completed the previous stages with support from their families, families within the parish, the Church and clergy.

The Catholic Church Assumptions

In adopting these three assumptions (strong family support during childhood and adolescence, strong faith and religious commitment, and successful completion of previous stages with the support of the

community), marriage preparation program developers are provided with distinct guidelines and parameters within which they can work. A program developed upon these assumptions would be highly faith-based. It would provide information on the sacramental aspects of marriage and explore in great detail Catholic traditions. It would have as its focus, the Catholic-Catholic couple relationship with little or no recognition of interfaith or interdenominational relationships, a growing trend in today's society. This program would be intended for well-adjusted, emotionally healthy Catholic couples. The majority of information would be complimentary to that which they have experienced growing up in the environment envisioned by the CCCB document.

The first assumption of strong family support during childhood and adolescence would influence program development and content by excluding basic Catholic sacramental teachings, as it assumes this has been accomplished within the family. The program and content would address the sacramental aspect of marriage preparation on a more complex theological grounding.

The second assumption, that couples enrolled in the course will have strong faith and religious commitment, would move content development away from the secular aspects of marriage and focus on the religious components. This assumption would necessitate more religion-based components and provide less focus on marriage in the secular world.

The third assumption presupposes that couples have successfully completed previous stages with the support of their families and the faith community. Programs developed with this assumption as a premise would strongly encourage couples to look to their families and community for support and direction as it further assumes that these relationships

are strong, healthy and capable of exemplar standing within the Church community.

However, marriage preparation program content developed under these assumptions would be narrow in scope, as it would be relevant to a limited number of those asking to be married in the Catholic Church. The CCCB document overlooks the reality of today's society. Many individuals or couples do not approach marriage with a background of supportive, faith-based parenting grounded in the Catholic tradition and involving the whole community.

In a diverse society of interfaith and interdenominational marriage between persons of different personal, economic, ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, coming from a combination of blended, single parent, traditional and non-traditional families, some more and some less functional, this theory of marriage preparation should be combined with a broader social theory recognizing this diversity.

The Social Exchange Theory

With the introduction of the Social Exchange theory, the emphasis is moderated from a solely focused Church-based theory to one which also incorporates a secular theory of relationships. By incorporating three assumptions of the Social Exchange theory and combining them with the assumptions of the CCCB document, the scope of marriage preparation is broadened and a more inclusive program can be developed. Combining the religious assumptions of the marriage relationship with those found in a more secular theory allows program development content that may appeal to a wider audience.

The first assumption from the Social Exchange theory which may help to frame a marriage preparation program is that social exchanges are characterized by interdependence (Boss et al, 1993). This assumption asserts that relationships are contingent on the ability of the couple to provide each other with rewards and, thereby, individually profit within the relationship. A program developed under this assumption would emphasize the importance to the individual of interdependence within the relationship.

A second assumption in exchange theory that would influence content of a marriage preparation program is that each individual evaluates the costs and rewards of a relationship differently (Boss et al., 1993). Each person varies in their definition of costs and rewards and these definitions also vary over time. With this in a mind, a program would emphasize the individual nature of each relationship and the uniqueness of a partnership such as marriage. It would accentuate the diversity within relationships over time. This may, in turn, encourage couples to understand their differences and discourage them from attempting to attain the non-existent or fictional "norm" which has been portrayed through movies, television and books.

A third assumption within exchange theory that can help frame research in program development and content is that people's experiences in relationships guide subsequent exchanges (Boss et al., 1993). Individuals whose past experience with a partner has been positive and rewarding are more likely to continue to invest in the relationship. A program with this assumption would focus on a developing relationship. It would emphasize that relationships do not exist as a result of the wedding but, in fact, develop as a result of positive or negative interactions over time. It would accentuate that couples build on each of

these exchanges developing comfort, security, confidence and trust throughout their relationship.

These three assumptions contained in the Social Exchange theory: that social exchanges are characterized by interdependence; that evaluation of costs and rewards varies over time and differs from one person to another; and that past experiences within a relationship guide subsequent exchanges, assist in program development for marriage preparation by focusing on the relationships. The assumptions within the CCCB document, strong family support during childhood and adolescence, strong faith and religious commitment and successful completion of previous stages with the support of the community, focus on the relationship within the context of the Church. By combining these six assumptions, a framework for program development and course content for marriage preparation can be developed that includes the religious as well as the secular component and may, therefore, appeal to and have significance for a greater number of participants. Marriage within the Church has strong religious significance, but as marriage also exists outside the Church, a program designed to prepare couples should incorporate both components.

A New Theory: The Church in Society Theory

By incorporating the assumptions of the CCCB document and those chosen from the Social Exchange theory, a new theory can be created providing a framework from which program development for marriage preparation, with a specific focus on content, can be researched. The assumptions of this new theory are as follows:

1. As the couples have asked for a Church wedding, there has been, to varying degrees, a religious component to their childhood and/or adolescence. Therefore it is assumed that every couple entering a marriage preparation program sponsored by the Catholic Church has some religious background and wishes, in some way, consciously recognized or not, to affirm the religious component of their relationship;

Assumption one is a variation of the first assumption (the remote preparation) presented in the CCCB document. This new assumption recognizes the existence and importance of religious teachings in one's life (from childhood and adolescence) as well as recognizing the diversity of individual backgrounds. It is, therefore, an expansion of the CCCB assumption in that it adopts inclusion rather than exclusion of those less familiar with the Catholic Church.

2. Given today's societal trend where religion is not a social barrier to marriage, it is assumed that the majority of couples requiring a marriage preparation course will be interfaith or interdenominational. However, as they are asking to be married within the Catholic Church, these couples have some tie to Catholic traditions;

Assumption two in the Church in Society theory again expands the assumption contained in the CCCB document by recognizing the reality facing the Catholic Church today; that is, that a greater number of couples seeking marriage in the Church are from inter-faith or inter-denominational relationships. By adopting this new assumption, the Church recognizes and reacts to societal changes while maintaining a strong Catholic component. As well, the needs of the Catholic partners can still be met without alienating the non-Catholic partners.

3. Within a relationship, social exchanges are characterized by interdependence, therefore the satisfaction level of individuals within the relationship is dependent upon each individual giving to the relationship and receiving rewards from the relationship;

4. Each individual is unique and it is therefore assumed each will interpret the giving and receiving from a relationship differently;

Assumptions three and four are taken from the Social Exchange theory and maintain their original form.

5. It is assumed that past experiences will guide subsequent exchanges within the relationship and that support from families and the community will also help to guide the relationship.

The last assumption is a combination of the third assumption of the Social Exchange theory and the third assumption from the CCCB document. This new assumption combines the view of past experiences guiding subsequent exchanges within a relationship with the assumption that support from families and the community are a part of that past. Together, past experiences, present and future support from families and the community will have a bearing on the future of the relationship.

Assumptions one and two relate to the religious component of the program whereas assumptions three, four and five relate to the interpersonal relationship of the couple. By accepting these five assumptions, a program can be developed that incorporates Church teachings and the secular components of marriage, thereby providing a course with content that it is assumed will appeal to church and interchurch couples.

Adopting assumptions one and two of the Church in Society theory would influence program development and content by focusing on the religious and faith aspects of the relationship (Anderson and Cotton-Fite, 1993). In the CCCB document, it was assumed that each couple had a strong religious background and, therefore, a more advanced theological approach to instruction would be taken. In this theory, the assumption is that there is some religious background, but not necessarily in the Catholic tradition and, in many cases, the backgrounds vary in knowledge and intensity of religious commitment. This would influence the approach in developing the religious component by concentrating on basic premises and teachings of marriage as a sacrament, responsibilities of the couple to the Church, faith journeys, and Catholic ideologies (Peters, 1986). These components would be presented during marriage preparation utilizing a far more general and basic approach than is proposed by the CCCB document.

The remaining three assumptions pertain to relationship development of the couple. These assumptions would guide the program by providing a framework in which to approach the intricacies of growth within the relationship. Helping couples to understand how a relationship can develop and understanding the basic components to all relationships can be of great benefit, specifically to those who have not previously contemplated the nature of relationships and, more generally, to all couples (Cavanagh, 1994). Understanding the need for give and take, the exchanges within a relationship (the Social Exchange theory), the uniqueness of the individual and the couple, and the role of extended family and friends in a marriage relationship can provide information that can enrich the growth of the relationship (Anderson, 1996; Mace and Mace, 1988).

These two components of a program, faith-based and relationship-based growth, could be the goals of the Catholic Church marriage preparation program. The next section discusses marriage preparation programs where these assumptions are implicit.

Themes in Marriage Preparation Programs

New programs are emerging throughout the United States and Canada in order to keep up with the demand for marriage preparation and for updated information on themes that affect engaged couples. As in the programs currently operating in the Edmonton Archdiocese, these programs offer a diversity of themes with communication, sexuality and spirituality being common to most of the programs (Colligan and Colligan, 1994; Dahl and Gallagher, 1992; Midgeley and Midgeley, 1992; Urbine, 1992). These programs are an excellent resource for parishes contemplating beginning their own programs, as they can be adapted to the specific needs of the parish. The themes within these programs are indicative of the Church in Society theoretical framework discussed earlier.

"A Decision to Love" (Midgeley and Midgeley, 1992) is a program from the United States designed to cover nine different themes in a three-night format. It can also be adapted to a one-day workshop; however, this may be an optimistic agenda as the recommendation is that the program be stretched into more than three evenings. Along with communication, sexuality, and spirituality, this program examines themes pertaining to family and friends as well as more difficult issues such as addiction, infertility, abuse, pregnancy and cohabitation. It is presented by facilitating couples sharing their experiences on the themes as well as

activities, stories, discussions and couple dialogue. This program is extremely ambitious and would require training facilitators to deal with difficult situations that may arise as a result of addressing the more difficult themes.

"Perspectives on Marriage" (Urbine, 1992) is a program designed in Illinois that also addresses many difficult themes although not to the extent of the program in the previous paragraph. The emphasis in this program is communication skill development, problem solving, and recognizing the spirituality of marriage and family. It can be modeled into a one-day, three evening, or weekend program. Along with questions for the couples and planned activities, a video can be used in conjunction with the program. A unique aspect of this program is a choice of exercises for the couples. Several options for exercises are presented after some of the themes and choosing one can be the responsibility of the couples or of the facilitators. This provides an opportunity for a more individualized program; one that appeals to an individual couple or to a group depending upon who chooses the exercises.

In 1992, "Evenings for the Engaged" was updated from its second edition of 1984, the first edition having been published in 1977 (Dahl and Gallagher, 1992). Although the themes of marriage in society, communication, God in marriage, sexuality, the sacrament of marriage, realistic expectations, and conflict resolution, remain constant, the questions and photographs in the handouts have been updated. These changes were important as couples reviewing older versions of the program could not respond seriously to the couple packages with outdated photographs. The questions in earlier versions continued to remain relevant in content, but needed to be updated in terms of language and sensitivity to inter-cultural and evolving social issues. This program

tends to address less controversial themes and focuses on the couple relationship with little reference to family and friends.

"Day-by-Day: A Program of Preparation for Christian Marriage" (Colligan and Colligan, 1994) closely resembles the "Evenings for the Engaged" program as to the themes covered and the presentation of materials. However, this program has a strong biblical aspect in that the presentations on themes revolve around a specific reading from the Bible. This program can be presented as a full day workshop or as a four-evening course. Although the themes covered (communication, sexuality, parenting, expectations, and the sacrament of matrimony) are similar to those covered in other programs, the emphasis is on the spiritual aspect of marriage as well as scriptural interpretations of passages on marriage. This course is designed for those with a strong spiritual background and may be best suited for practicing Catholic/Catholic couples.

Overall, the major themes presented in marriage preparation programs identified in this program review are as follows:

communication
sexuality
spirituality
God in marriage
Sacrament of marriage
conflict resolution
parenting
finances.

Table 2-1 identifies these themes as reflected in current and emerging marriage preparation programs. It should be indicated that some of these marriage preparation programs include themes not set out in the preceding list.

Table 2-1

Themes in Existing Marriage Preparation Programs

Program	Themes
A Decision to Love	communication, sexuality, spirituality family & friends, addiction, infertility, abuse, pregnancy, cohabitation
Perspectives on Marriage	communication, skill development, problem solving, spirituality, family
Evenings for the Engaged	marriage in society, communication, God in marriage, sexuality, sacrament of marriage, realistic expectations, conflict resolution
Day by Day	communication, sexuality, parenting, expectations, sacrament of matrimony
Family Enrichment Center & Enriched Program	dispelling fears, conflict resolution, interfaith & interchurch marriages, sexuality, spirituality, expectations of marriage, finances, the ceremony
Engaged Encounter	decisions in marriage, marriage morality, communication, spirituality, differences, sacrament, sexuality, forgiveness
A Catholic Perspective & Beginnings	communication, financial planning, sacrament, spirituality, marriage liturgy, parenthood
When a Couple Marries	natural family planning, financial planning, legal concerns, personal identities, ceremony, communication

Summary

Literature on marriage preparation has become increasingly available in the past twenty years. Publications, programs and commentaries are available addressing both marriage preparation within the context of the Catholic Church and within the broader social context. It is almost universally accepted that marriage preparation is a valuable tool in creating a strong foundation for a marriage and subsequent family life.

The theory of this thesis in reviewing marriage preparation programs combines the assumptions of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops document " Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage" and the Social Exchange theory, thereby creating a new theory, the Church in Society theory. The Church in Society theory encompasses both the spiritual and secular aspects of marriage preparation and broadens the appeal of these programs to a more diverse and varied couple population.

The programs reviewed to this point include the centralized programs of the Family Enrichment Center, the couple inventories, the international Engaged Encounter program, a number of programs currently available for use as individualized parish programs . Themes most commonly found in marriage preparation programs are communication, sexuality and spirituality.

The next chapter presents the research methodology, research instruments and data collection processes used for this study as well as

addressing the organization of the data and the process used to conduct the analysis

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate three aspects of marriage preparation programs in the Edmonton Archdiocese:

1. What themes or topics should be included in all marriage preparation programs;
2. What would be the optimum administrative format for these programs; and
3. Is there a perceived need for formal follow-up programs to provide ongoing support for marriages after the wedding.

This chapter examines firstly, the preliminary questionnaire which was designed to introduce the researcher and the topic of marriage preparation to the individual parishes within the Archdiocese. As well, this preliminary questionnaire was the instrument through which information was gathered for the development of the survey questionnaire, the principal questionnaire. A review of supportive literature and historical research which provided the background for the study is then presented. This is followed by a discussion of the development of the principal questionnaire and an explanation of the data collection methodology, including the pilot study, the population and sampling. The methods of questionnaire distribution and collection are then followed by an exploration of a strategy for data analysis.

The Preliminary Questionnaire

Prior to beginning this study in the fall of 1997, the approval of the Archbishop of Edmonton, His Grace Archbishop Joseph MacNeil was sought (see Appendices A and B). As the research involved members of his Archdiocese as well as programs conducted under his guidance, it was felt that any research conducted within the parameters anticipated by this study should be done with the knowledge and consent of the Archbishop. A proposal for the study was submitted to Archbishop MacNeil who in turn granted his approval and extended his cooperation and that of the parishes, commissions and agencies involved with marriage preparation for the purposes of this study. He suggested to the researcher that the results of this study could provide guidelines for marriage preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese by facilitating adoption of common themes for all programs within the Archdiocese.

After obtaining the approval from the Archbishop for the study, a preliminary questionnaire with an explanatory cover letter (see Appendix C) was designed to gather background information from the individual parishes within the Edmonton Archdiocese (Appendix D). Because there has been, to date, no centralized recording or documentation of marriage preparation programs within the Archdiocese, it was necessary to gather this preliminary information upon which to base further study questions. The primary purpose of this preliminary questionnaire was to determine which parishes were presenting their own marriage preparation programs and which were using the central programs at the Family Enrichment Center or other programs or inventories. This questionnaire was also

helpful as an introduction of myself as the researcher as well as informing the parishes of the subsequent study.

The preliminary questionnaire consisted of fifteen open-ended questions pertaining to marriage preparation in the individual parishes, (e.g., "What marriage preparation program is currently in use in your parish?). The open-ended questions were designed to produce information that could be used for the purpose of this study as well as for the broader information of the Family Enrichment Center, a commission of the Edmonton Archdiocese responsible for addressing the needs of families (marriage preparation being one focus). The questionnaire asked the name of the parish, the name of a marriage preparation contact person or couple, whether the parish had its own program for marriage preparation or used the Family Enrichment Center, as well as details on the program used in their parish. This information was valuable in providing a foundation on which to develop a research instrument.

The preliminary questionnaire was faxed to each of the ninety parishes in the Edmonton Archdiocese. The cover letter and questionnaire were addressed to the parish secretary and response was requested by fax. It was determined that a fax would attract more immediate attention than would a letter, as parishes are normally inundated with mail. By bringing the fax to the attention of the parish secretary rather than the parish priest, it was anticipated that the return rate would be greater than if the fax was addressed to the priest, due to the responsibilities that surround parish priests today.

The questionnaire was faxed out on September 25, 1997. It was requested that returns be received no later than October 15, 1997. By the end of September, 37 (over 40%) of the 90 parishes had responded. By

October 20, 1997, 62 (69%) had responded by fax or telephone. Three parishes responded by telephone, preferring to relay their responses personally rather than by machine.

Through the responses to this preliminary questionnaire, a clearer picture of marriage preparation in the Edmonton Archdiocese was developed. It was found that:

1. only 15 of the 90 parishes within the Archdiocese provide their own marriage preparation program; the remaining parishes rely on a central program provided by the Family Enrichment Center, Engaged Encounter or a marriage inventory;

2. a wide variety of topics are presented in these programs ranging from sacrament and theology of marriage to finances and leisure activities; and

3. no one theme is present in all marriage preparation programs delivered in the Edmonton Archdiocese.

The preliminary research also indicated a need for further research in the area of marriage preparation in order to delineate a common direction for these programs within the Archdiocese. This reinforced an original suggestion which arose in the initiation of the study which was that the study may provide guidelines which could result in improved program content (for example, themes or topics) and delivery of marriage preparation programs. Central to this research was the question as to what the members of the Edmonton Archdiocese believed to be the most beneficial themes or topics that should be addressed in a marriage preparation program, what format best suits the needs of engaged couples, and if there is a need for ongoing support after marriage. Data

were collected to answer these questions in this study through a second questionnaire.

The information from the preliminary questionnaire provided insight for the development of the research instrument. For example, the preliminary questionnaire requested the name of the parish of the respondent. As it did not ask the respondent to specify the city or town of their parish, there was some initial confusion as some rural parishes have the same name as parishes within Edmonton. As a result, in developing the second questionnaire, one question asked for the name of the parish and its city or town, thereby eliminating subsequent confusion in regard to location of similar parish names. Additional information regarding the type of marriage preparation program, the time involved in presenting the program, major themes, format, number of courses offered in a year, and number of couples prepared annually all provided necessary background in order to understand the status of marriage preparation in the Archdiocese. Understanding the present status of marriage preparation programs and the guidelines of the theoretical framework (the Church in Society theory) guided the development of the second questionnaire.

Archival Research

The previous chapter addressed the review of relevant literature to this study of marriage preparation within the Edmonton Archdiocese. In addition to the insight from the preliminary questionnaire, it was important to examine the archival research for this research to be as accurate as possible when re-telling the history of the Archdiocese, marriage preparation within the Archdiocese, and the Family Enrichment Center.

The Chancery Archives is located in the basement of the Catholic Pastoral Center, a complex that houses many of the commissions, resources and the offices of the Chancery and Archbishop. Information in the archives is comprised of books, pictures, letters, minutes of past board meetings, financial records, annual reports by commissions and agencies, rental agreements, newspaper and magazine articles, maps and personal correspondence. Current information, from the 1980s and on, is processed and filed under the appropriate committee, group, agency or commission. The more dated information, prior to the 1980s, is contained in file folders and preserved in large filing cabinets.

In conducting this study, it was necessary to utilize the Chancery Archives in order to gather the basic historical background of the Archdiocese to lay a foundation for this study. As well, providing the history of marriage preparation was essential in understanding the evolution of the Church's support for marriage preparation. The historical information used for this study was contained in two file folders. Inside each of these folders was a neat, well-maintained set of notes. A lace carefully tied these notes together. The information was organized chronologically with a mixture of annual reports, financial records, newspaper clippings and other various sources of information. In some instances, where a gap existed, such as a jump in dates (from1957 to 1959), a handwritten note of a personal remembrance was dated and included. Authors of these notes were anonymous, but the notes themselves filled in blanks in the history and were sometimes corroborated by personal interview (Sr. C. Dupuis, personal communication, January 22, 1998) or with information of a more recent date. The opportunity did not exist to confirm all information, which resulted in some uncorroborated information. However, by speaking with several individuals familiar with the Archdiocese and its history, their

remembrances were in accordance with those captured in the Chancery Archives.

The Principal Questionnaire

The principal questionnaire was developed using information gathered in the preliminary survey (previously discussed) and the pilot study (discussed in a later section) (Appendix F). Questions were designed to elicit information valuable to the future of marriage preparation programs in the Edmonton Archdiocese. The questionnaire was four pages in length and contained 20 questions. It was organized into four informal sections: biographical information (questions 1-4), familiarity and background knowledge of marriage preparation programs (questions 5-13), opinions of marriage preparation program content (questions 14 and 15), and administrative questions (questions 16-20).

The Church in Society theory directed development of the four sections of the principal questionnaire. This theory assumes some religious background of one or both of the partners. The first question asked for the name of the parish of the respondent. Therefore, the first question established religious affiliation. The fourth assumption in the Church in Society theory is that past experience will guide subsequent exchanges. The second question requested the age of the respondent. The age of the respondent may be of assistance in gauging the history of past experiences to be drawn upon by the respondent. The fourth question asked the length of a respondent's marriage. The theory also assumes that individuals within a relationship give and receive rewards in order to sustain that relationship over time. Longer marriages may, in fact, be an indication that the respondent has experienced the giving and receiving of rewards which have been noted to sustain relationships.

The second section of the principal questionnaire addressed familiarity and background knowledge of marriage preparation programs. This section highlighted some assumptions of the theory. It provided information on religious background, insofar as that may be measured by the taking of a religious marriage preparation program, and whether it was a program sponsored by another faith. It highlighted the level of satisfaction which respondents may attribute to the taking of a marriage preparation program. This section initially identified themes or topics which were reportedly helpful to the respondent and whether these themes or topics were of a secular or religious nature.

The third section of questions in the principal questionnaire sought to elicit opinions on marriage preparation program content. If past experiences guide subsequent relationship exchanges as suggested in the Church in Society theory, this would be reflected in these reported opinions. In addition, as each respondent is unique, each will interpret differently which topics or themes in marriage preparation programs assisted them in giving and receiving in their own relationship.

The final section of questions addressed administrative format, learning styles, and ongoing support for marriages after the wedding. The answer to the final question in particular will again reflect the support from families and the community which the respondent believes are or should be available to guide the relationship.

The majority of questions in the principal questionnaire were multiple choice with some questions providing open-ended space so as to allow participants the opportunity to expand on their responses if they so wished.

Discussion of the Principal Questionnaire

Question 1 was an open-ended question designed to determine the parish of the respondent. As it was the strategy of this study to gather information from throughout the Archdiocese, the responses to this question would distinguish whether the majority of participants were from rural or urban parishes.

Questions 2, 3 and 4 were more biographical in nature. Question 2 provided for a multiple response with five discrete choices pertaining to the age of the respondent. Question 3 was again a multiple response question providing six choices in regard to the respondents' current life status: (married, single, divorced, cohabiting, widowed, clergy or religious). However, the question did not specifically limit the respondent to a single choice, and for example, a respondent might indicate that he or she was a divorced person and living with a partner. Rather than force individuals into making a choice which might produce anger or anxiety, possibly affecting subsequent responses, it was believed that respondents should have the opportunity to mark their appropriate choices and leave the interpretation to the researcher.

The last of the biographical questions, question 4, is related to the previous question. Respondents who answered question 3 by indicating they were married were asked to identify the number of years they had been married: (less than 6 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, 21-30 years or more than 30 years). It is assumed that respondents of greater length of marriage will have more life experience with marriage and wisdom upon which to draw in particularly answering the third section of questions in the questionnaire.

Questions 5 through 13 focused on the respondents' familiarity with and background in marriage preparation. The first of these questions asked if the respondent had taken a marriage preparation program. If the answer were no, then those respondents were instructed to omit the next six questions. Question 6 asked respondents to identify from the enumerated choices the year in which they took a marriage preparation program. From the responses, it may be possible to ascertain the style of program that was available at that time. The seventh question provided the opportunity for respondents to indicate the marriage preparation courses they had taken. There were nine available choices with the opportunity to specify in a short answer if the program was not included in the choice list (there are no records of all marriage preparation programs available in the Edmonton Archdiocese prior to 1987). Respondents were asked to check all that applied to them as some couples take more than one preparation program before marriage. The final choice provided a response for those unable to remember the program taken thereby lessening the frustration level of this question.

Question 8 provided four choices from which respondents could choose the answer which best described their reasons for taking marriage preparation: (it was required, I was interested, my fiancé wanted to take the course, or other). The fourth choice (other) allowed respondents to add their own reasons with a space provided for a short answer. Again, the question did not prompt respondents to choose only one answer.

Questions 9 and 10 examined the attitudes of the respondents to marriage preparation programs. Question 9 was constructed in a Likert rating scale asking participants to rate their marriage preparation program on a five-point scale from (1) very helpful to (5) very unhelpful.

There was a middle option of "no opinion" for the benefit of those who may have had an unclear recollection of their course as well as those who could not rate the program helpful or unhelpful. Question 10 provided four choices for those responding to question 9. Those four choices (during the course and immediately following, within the first two years of marriage, some time after the second year of marriage, or no opinion or unhelpful) identified a time when in their marriage the respondents found information from the marriage preparation program useful or very useful. The fourth choice (no opinion or unhelpful) provided the opportunity for those responding negatively or neutrally to question 9 (unhelpful, very unhelpful or no opinion) to restate their answer rather than omit the question.

Question 11 was designed to elicit a response as to a theme or themes from marriage preparation programs that stood out as being helpful. Respondents were invited to expand on a "yes" response specifying in short answer the topics or themes they found helpful.

Questions 12 and 13 were intended to ascertain the current involvement of the respondents with marriage preparation programs. In these questions, respondents were asked if their involvement with the programs was as a participant or a facilitator.

Questions 14 and 15 comprised the third "section" of the questionnaire, the opinions of the respondents as to the content of marriage preparation programs. These questions were designed to address a central issue of this study. Question 14, which referred to the content of marriage preparation programs, required participants to choose five topics they believed most relevant to these programs. In addition to this, participants were also asked to rate their agreement of inclusion of

listed themes currently present in marriage preparation programs throughout the Edmonton Archdiocese on a Likert rating scale. These themes were taken from the responses in the preliminary questionnaire as well as from suggestions of those associated with the pilot study.

Question 14 was a two-part question. Twenty-five themes were listed in the right column of the page. Some selected themes illustrated topics drawn from Church assumptions of critical content, such as sacrament, spirituality, theology of marriage, God in marriage, bible study and interchurch marriage. Other selected themes were drawn from secular or societal expectations of course content such as communication, legal issues, conflict resolution, sexuality, finances and parenting. This mixed selection of themes or content is important in balancing Church assumptions and societal expectations in developing a unique theory of marriage preparation education: the Church in Society theory as discussed in Chapter two.

In the first section of question 14, respondents were asked to check five themes that they believed to be important and that should be included in all marriage preparation programs. It was believed that asking respondents to check five important themes would be less time-consuming than asking them to rate their top five choices in order of their perceived importance. By doing so, it was expected that a greater number of respondents would respond to this question.

The second section of question 14 was designed using a Likert rating scale. Respondents were asked to rate each of the twenty-five themes from (1) strongly agreeing to (5) strongly disagreeing with the inclusion of this theme in marriage preparation programs. The purpose of this second section was to examine the strength of the response to

marriage preparation content. The respondent could strongly agree that discussion of the wedding ceremony should be included in marriage preparation, strongly disagree that dual career lifestyles should be included, or indicate no particular feeling as to whether expectations of marriage should or should not be included in all marriage preparation programs.

Question 15 provided an opportunity for respondents to expand on the list of themes. If respondents believed the list provided in question 14 was inclusive of all themes they saw as beneficial to marriage preparation, they would simply indicate that no other themes or topics should be considered. If they thought themes or topics other than those listed should be included in marriage preparation programs, a space was provided to identify these themes. The results of the responses to questions 14 and 15 would determine recommendations for common themes in marriage preparation programs throughout the Edmonton Archdiocese.

The remaining questions, 16 through 20, comprise the fourth informal section of the questionnaire and addressed the administrative issues of marriage preparation. These questions were designed to explore the attitudes of the members of the Edmonton Archdiocese as they pertained to administrative specifics of marriage preparation programs. Question 16 gave multiple options from which the respondents could choose their opinion as to when a church sponsored marriage preparation should begin. Questions 17 and 18 asked for specifics as to the best format and time of week for the programs. Respondents could choose from five options in question 17 and make three choices in question 18. Again, as in the first part of question 14, respondents were asked only to check three choices rather than struggle with a ranking system. The responses

to these questions could provide insight into the best time to present a marriage preparation program.

Question 19 provided five options from which respondents disclose their personal learning styles (e.g., accommodater, assimilator,...). The fourth choice afforded the respondents the option of combining any or all of the listed choices in short answer form. The fifth choice provided the opportunity to expand on the options provided if their preference was not listed as a choice. The responses will be of help when deciding on a format for marriage preparation.

The final question asked respondents to agree or disagree with the suggestion that there be ongoing support for relationships after marriage. If the response was "yes," there was space provided for a short elaboration.

The principal questionnaire was designed to elicit the respondents true opinions on the content and administration of marriage preparation programs (construct validity). Construct validity can be illustrated by comparing the answers given by the respondents with the information already available from the literature review, the information gathered in the preliminary questionnaire, and the comments elicited in the pilot study.

With respect to reliability of the principal questionnaire, no re-testing of the same respondents was undertaken to determine whether they would repeat the opinions given in answer to this questionnaire. However, as to the critical opinion component of the study, question 14, the respondents were first asked to identify the five most important topics or themes that should be included in all marriage preparation programs.

Secondly, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement as to whether each of the topics or themes should be included in all marriage preparation programs. If the respondent "strongly agreed" that each of the most important topic or themes identified in the first part of question 14 should, in the second part of question 14, be included in all programs, that is an indication of the reliability of the opinion of the respondent as to topics or themes.

The Pilot Study

At the completion of the development of the research questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted in November of 1997. The purpose of this pilot study was to review the questionnaire with facilitators of marriage preparation programs, making certain that questions were not ambiguous or confusing. It was also anticipated that the pilot would indicate if questions might have been omitted.

The pilot study involved twelve individuals currently involved in leading marriage preparation programs. The decision to engage those familiar with marriage preparation for the pilot study was to take advantage of the experience and expertise of these individuals with themes, program format and administration currently in use.

The pilot study was conducted as a focus group on November 9, 1997. The questionnaire was sent to the participants prior to the date of the discussion group. In this manner, participants were able to respond to the questionnaire and bring their concerns to the focus group. As a result of the focus discussion, some questions were changed, making them less ambiguous and as well, questions were added expanding the scope of the questionnaire. For example, question 2 asked the age category of the

respondent. The original response list had fewer choices with larger range years (20-40 years, 40-60 years). One participant in his early 40s found it uncomfortable to be included with 60 year olds. The question was subsequently changed to reflect this comment. In addition, most of the participants suggested it was important to add a last question to the survey asking respondents their opinion of follow-up programs after marriage.

The average time for completing the questionnaire during the pilot study was estimated at ten minutes. This information was included in the preamble to the questionnaire in hope that more participants would respond, as it was not a large time commitment.

Data Collection

Data collection was influenced by several factors: sample and population, ethical considerations, the procedures for distributing the survey instrument, as well as the procedures for the return of the questionnaires.

Sample and Population

The question of whom to survey for the purposes of this study was difficult to address. There are over 55,000 registered families in the Edmonton Archdiocese, the target population. However, time and financial restrictions necessarily limited the number of participants for this study (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996).

Initially, it was intended to survey people across the Archdiocese, with participants representing both rural and urban parishes. If the

results of the study were to influence future changes in the content and delivery of marriage preparation programs, it was important that all regions of the Edmonton Archdiocese had input. Within the Archdiocese rural parishes often believe that decisions are made by the larger centers (Edmonton and Red Deer) and that their contributions are seen as less important and have less impact. However, information was received by the researcher from the Catholic Pastoral Center and from several parish offices that parishes would be unwilling or unable to divulge information regarding parishioners, making it difficult to collect names and addresses for a random sampling across the Archdiocese. It was evident that an alternate method of choosing the sample would be necessary.

The Synod on the Family (as discussed in Chapter 1), held in the Edmonton Archdiocese from 1993 to 1997, included a large gathering (Synod Assembly, 1995) with delegates representing rural and urban parishes, commissions and agencies. These people were selected by their individual parishes, commissions or agencies and were a mix of gender and age as well as representing single, married, widowed, divorced, clergy and religious. There were over 200 delegates at the Synod gathering. In discussion with the Archbishop, he advised that this was the first Synod gathering in the 145-year history of the Edmonton Archdiocese and its predecessors, and that a Synod is traditionally only conducted in an Archdiocese once in every one hundred years. He also indicated that the theme of the Synod was the family and that a major focus within that theme was on marriage. The Archbishop indicated that the participants at the Synod Assembly had been studying, praying, discussing and formulating resolutions with respect to family and marriage issues for a period of three years. He said that this group of persons would be the most knowledgeable, focused and involved group within the Edmonton Archdiocese to provide information on marriage preparation. Finally, he

observed that at other times in other years many other studies could be conducted with respect to marriage preparation with other samples (for example, newlyweds, marriage preparation facilitators, young adults) but that this would be the only opportunity in this century to utilize the specially convened sample of the Synod Assembly. The Archbishop strongly supported that the sample for this study be a sample drawn from the Synod Assembly. The results of this study could, therefore, be utilized by the Archdiocese to confirm the reliability of the results of the Synod and would reflect the culmination of the years of discussion, study and implementation. This researcher was persuaded for all of the above reasons that the optimum sample for this study would consist of members of the Synod Assembly. Academically, this would be classified as a sample of convenience; for all of the previously mentioned reasons, this was a sample most appropriate to this study.

Permission was granted by the Archbishop to use the list of names from the Synod Assembly on the premise that individuals would be advised that they were chosen for this study as a result of being a delegate at the Synod gathering but that the study was not related to the Synod Implementation Committee (of which the researcher is a member) (M. MacCaffery, personal communication, October 22, 1997).

It was decided, in addition to the Synod sample, that a newlywed perspective could be important to this study. However, contacting newlyweds can be complex. The Family Enrichment Center recently (within the last three years) initiated a Newlywed program. The addresses of these couples were made available for this research. This list was not extensive and addresses of some couples were not current. Only 10 questionnaires could be distributed to individuals in this group.

Ethical Considerations

The major survey instrument, the questionnaire, was mailed to participants to complete voluntarily and anonymously. The purpose and nature of the study was explained to the participants in a cover letter attached to the questionnaire (see Appendix E). This letter explained who was conducting the survey, under whose authority it was issued, and briefly outlined the information sought. The cover letter stated that participation was completely voluntary and although responses were appreciated, the participants were under no obligation to return the questionnaire. No major formal follow-up was conducted. However, as a reminder, a request was sent to all parishes one month after the questionnaire was originally mailed asking that they insert into their Sunday church bulletins a notice urging all questionnaire recipients to complete and return the questionnaire. An informal telephone canvas of several parishes demonstrated that such a notice was being placed in Sunday bulletins.

The questionnaires did not include names or space for a name to be added and were not coded. As a result, the researcher was unable to personally contact those who chose not to respond, thereby protecting the individual's right to opt out of the survey. It was assumed that participants voluntarily completing and returning the questionnaire demonstrated their consent by doing so. All responses were sent directly to the home of the researcher and only the researcher reviewed the questionnaires. These responses were stored in a locked filing cabinet and at the conclusion of the research, the questionnaires were shredded to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

There was no risk or threat of harm to any individual as a result of the study or questionnaire return. No responses could be or were traced back to any individual and the questionnaire itself was not designed with highly personal or threatening questions which may have been cause for concern for individuals.

A "Description of Project and Procedures for Observing Ethical Guidelines" was submitted to the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta and approved prior to the distribution of the questionnaires.

Questionnaire Distribution and Return

A total of 232 questionnaires were mailed to Synod delegates and recent graduates of the Newlywed program sponsored by the Family Enrichment Center on January 6, 1998. (Sudman, (1976), suggested a minimum of 100 subjects for survey research). This mail out consisted of a cover letter, the questionnaire and a stamped envelope addressed to the researcher's home (Appendices E and F). It was anticipated that the return would take approximately three weeks. Participants were requested to return the completed questionnaires by January 31, 1998. By that date, 115 (50%) completed questionnaires were returned. Seven questionnaires (3%) were returned undelivered, marked "no such address" or "moved." Heberlein and Baumgartner (1978) reviewed 181 questionnaire studies, categorizing each study as "salient," "possibly salient," or "nonsalient" (how prominent or important a concern is for a respondent). Average return rate for salient studies was 77%, 66% for possibly salient studies, and 42% for nonsalient studies. The return rate for this study appears to be low for a possibly salient study.

In response to the questionnaire, there were two queries, one by e-mail and one by telephone. The e-mail communication suggested that the respondent was unfamiliar with marriage preparation in her parish and suggested two couples for further communication. The response to this e-mail by the researcher assured the respondent that her input would be valuable to the study. It is not known whether one of the received questionnaires was from this respondent. The telephone response requested that his contribution be verbal rather than in the form of the questionnaire. His response will be addressed separately from the questionnaire data in the following chapter.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study had the following delimitations:

1. Data were collected only from participants at the Synod Assembly held in Edmonton in November of 1995. The researcher was not involved in selecting individual members for the study sample.
2. Data gathering was carried out during the months of January and February in 1998.
3. Information was obtained only from members of the Archdiocese of Edmonton.

The following limitations are found in the study:

1. The study is limited by the level of knowledge which the respondents had regarding marriage preparation progams.
2. The questionnaires used in the study are limited in that they may have omitted to ask questions which could have elicited additional valuable information.
3. Although the Synod Assembly itself was representative of a range of adult age groups, those who responded to the survey reflected a greater

number of older rather thanyounger attendees. This limitation was a result of the delimitation in utilizing participants of the Synod Assembly as the survey sample.

These limitations and delimitations may restrict generalizations from the study to a broader population. As a result of the delimitation to utilize representatives of the Synod Assembly as suggested by the Archbishop of Edmonton, the respondents surveyed were necessarily strong supporters of the Catholic Church, many had spent a number of years in the Synod process reflecting upon, studying and making recommendations with respect to family life issues. In addition, the resulting limitation was that there were a number of respondents over the age of 60 and who had been married for more than 30 years.

Although this sample was significant for the Archbishop, reflected responses based upon extensive life and marriage experience and a spiritually focused perspective, the responses given may not be reflective of the broader community. It may be that the broader community would have a lesser spiritual focus, would include a larger group of younger, single and less experienced respondents who may have different values in identifying themes or formats desirable in marriage preparation programs.

However, it should be reiterated, as supported in the literature, that the actual respondents to this study probably reflect greater experience about topics relevant for marriage preparation (having greater life experience in marriage) and a general overall understanding of the concomitant topics relevant to marriage, arising from their life stage (Knox, 1981; Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). Mark Tennant and Philip Pogson, in their book, *Learning and change in the adult years* (1995),

address the issue of expertise in a non-academic field. They argue that knowledge leading to expertise in a specific non-academic field is comprised largely of experiential and non-analytical instances. Individuals evolve into experts in their field over time as they increase their experiences within that field. Tennant and Pogson state that experts interpret problems and their solutions at a deeper level of understanding than do non-experts. Therefore, in reference to marriage, those with a longer life experience in marriage could be described as experts in their field and, thusly, be more capable of interpreting and understanding marriage.

Despite these acknowledged delimitations and limitations, the responses received from the sample closely reflect what this researcher has observed and experienced in 19 years of facilitating marriage preparation programs in this Archdiocese. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations which are arrived at by reliance upon the responses to the principal questionnaire are intuitively supportive of the experience of this researcher.

Summary

This thesis investigates marriage preparation programs currently available in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton. This investigation was conducted by use of a preliminary questionnaire distributed to all parishes in the Archdiocese of Edmonton. The responses from this questionnaire provided the background information needed for developing a second survey instrument. This second survey, the principal questionnaire, was distributed for the purpose of surveying active members of the Archdiocese, including those persons who participated in the Synod process, the clergy of the Archdiocese who were part of the

Synod process, those persons currently engaged in presentation of marriage preparation programs (through the pilot study) and some graduates of the Newlywed program presented by the Family Enrichment Center. The latter survey, the principal questionnaire, asked the opinions, comments and concerns of these members of the Archdiocese to determine what themes, topics and areas of discussion would be most beneficial in a marriage preparation program. In theory, this latter group was asked to make suggestions for the content of the optimum generic marriage preparation program.

Statistical analysis was accomplished using SPSSX. This analysis and findings are presented in next chapter.

CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF DATA ANALYSES

The purpose of this study was to identify critical themes or topics that should be addressed in marriage preparation programs or courses, the format of these programs, and if there was a perceived need for ongoing support after the wedding. The theoretical framework, the Church in Society theory, guided the process by assuring that the focus went beyond the parameters of the CCCB document on marriage preparation and included the developing relationship between the engaged couple.

As the Catholic Church requires that couples seeking marriage within the Church take a marriage preparation program, the opportunity exists to provide couples with tools and information which may be useful in future life situations or problems. A descriptive survey method was utilized to gather this information. A questionnaire was developed as the data collection tool and distributed to 232 members of the Edmonton Archdiocese on January 6, 1998. A total of 115 responses were returned for a response rate of 50%. Seven questionnaires (6%) were returned as undeliverable. The principal questionnaire was analyzed using SPSSX for descriptive statistics. The opportunity for respondents to elaborate on choices provided qualitative data which were incorporated in the analysis.

This chapter presents the results of the data analyses, and is organized according to the four areas of the principal questionnaire: demographic information, knowledge of marriage preparation programs, content opinions, and administrative issues.

Demographic Information

The Edmonton Archdiocese is a large geographical jurisdiction composed of both rural and urban parishes. Of the 90 parishes included in the survey, 53 (59%) were within the city of Edmonton. The remaining 37 (41%) were located in the smaller cities and towns within the region. Respondents represented 69 (77%) of the parishes. Less than half of these respondents (41%), which represented 36% of the total returned responses, listed their parish as being within the city of Edmonton. The sample was, therefore, well-distributed throughout the Archdiocese with no one area dominating in returned responses.

No parish had more than five respondents. The majority of the represented parishes (43 or 62%) provided one response, while 26 (38%) provided two or more responses. Seven respondents did not indicate their parish.

Table 4-1 outlines demographic data. There was approximately equal representation from all age categories (32%, 29%, and 27%) except those below forty years of age (12%).

The large majority of respondents (81 or 70%) indicated their life status as married. Eleven respondents (10%) were recorded as clergy or religious. The remaining 20% (23 respondents) represented persons who were single, living with a partner, widowed, divorced or separated.

Of those indicating their marital status, 38 (41%) had been married more than 30 years. Forty-eight per cent recorded their years of marriage

Table 4-1

Demographic Table
(N=115)

Characteristic	n	%
Age		
61 or older	36	32
51 - 60 years	31	27
41 - 50 years	33	29
less than 40 years	14	12
Current Life Status		
married	81	70
single, cohabiting., widowed, divorced or separated	23	20
clergy or religious	11	10
If Married, How Long		
more than 30 years	38	41
11 - 30 years	44	48
less than 10 years	10	11

as being between 11 and 30 years. Only 10 (11%) had been married fewer than 10 years.

Demographically, it appears that the respondents properly reflect urban and rural populations within the Edmonton Archdiocese with equitable and broad parish representation. The respondents, however, are under-representative of younger members of the Archdiocese and over-representative of the population over 61 years of age.

This over-representation of older and married respondents and under-representation of younger single persons is typical of church attendance in the Catholic Archdiocese and may reflect church affiliation in a secular society. This representation, however, does reflect the importance of lived experience in a marriage which contributes significantly to a study of this nature.

As a result, the following data analysis is guided by the demographics and results must be understood and interpreted in light of these demographics.

Knowledge of Marriage Preparation Programs

This section of the instrument (questions 5-13) was designed to explore respondents' involvement with marriage preparation programs in the Edmonton Archdiocese. The data are presented in Table 4-2. The

Table 4-2

Knowledge of Marriage Preparation Programs
(N=46)

Characteristic	n	valid %
Taken Marriage Preparation *(N=115)		
no	65	59
yes	46	41
When Program was Taken		
prior to 1960	3	7
1970 - 1979	18	39
1960 - 1969	15	33
1980 or later	10	22
Programs Attended		
a program within your parish	10	22
Catholic Information Center	5	11
Engaged Encounter	5	11
Family Enrichment Center	3	7
central program	3	7
a different faith program	2	4
other	9	20
don't remember	10	22
Note: Respondents were asked to check all programs they attended		
Reasons for Taking MP		
It was required	27	59
I was interested	19	41
My fiancé was interested	5	11
other	11	
Note: Respondents could check more than one reason		
Helpfulness of Marriage Prep		
helpful	25	57
very helpful	11	25
unhelpful	6	14
no opinion	2	5
Program Information Useful:		
during or immediately following the program	30	65
within the first two years of marriage	23	50
some time after the second year of marriage	16	35
no opinion or unhelpful	9	
Note: Respondents were asked to check all that apply		

* N=115 for this question only. All other questions, (only those who had taken MP answered) N=46.

first question in this section asked respondents if they had taken a marriage preparation program or course. Of the sample, 65 (59%) had never taken a marriage preparation program; 46 (41%) of the respondents had taken a marriage preparation program. The 41% who had taken a marriage preparation program were the only respondents to answer the next six questions, as those who had not taken a program were directed to skip to question 12.

Question 6 asked respondents to indicate the year they had taken a marriage preparation program. Of those who had taken a marriage preparation program, thirty-nine per cent (18) took a program between 1970 and 1979. Between 1960 and 1969, 33% (15) of the respondents had enrolled in a program.

Question 7 asked respondents to indicate which programs they had attended. This question allowed participants to check all programs that they had attended. The majority of respondents (22%) took programs that were provided through their own parish. However, an equal number of the respondents did not remember the name of the marriage preparation program in which they were involved. Five respondents (11%) indicated they had taken the course presented by the Catholic Information Center revealing the fact that their course was prior to the commencement of the Family Enrichment Center course which began in 1987.

This question provided the opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their choices. Not all of these elaborated on their choice. Some respondents did not indicate any choice but provided necessary details of the program in which they were involved. A number of written responses simply gave the name of the program such as "Mosaic," or "Beginnings" or explained that the relevant programs were taken in Calgary, Hamilton,

Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Germany. One respondent indicated involvement in two marriage preparation programs as she or he had been divorced and enrolled in a program prior to each of the weddings. Another respondent wrote that theirs was an inter-denominational marriage and that they had taken two marriage preparation programs, one in each faith.

Question 8 asked respondents to check the reason for taking a marriage preparation program. The responses to this question are outlined in Table 4-2. A large majority of those responding (59%) to this question indicated the reason for taking a marriage preparation program was because it was required. Forty-one per cent (19) of the respondents indicated they were interested in taking the program while five said their fiancé wanted to take the program. As in question 7, this question provided the opportunity to check more than one response and to elaborate on their choice. Five respondents (11%) chose to elaborate; two very strongly signifying their reason for taking the marriage preparation program was because both partners were interested. This may have been a result of the direction being unclear as to the possibility of checking more than one response.

There were other comments made in response to question 8. Two respondents had indicated in a previous question that their life status was clergy or religious. Despite this, they chose to answer this question stating that they had taken marriage preparation in an effort to understand what was involved in the programs. One elaborated that by participating in a marriage preparation program, he or she would be better equipped to provide direction for the engaged couples. One respondent indicated that marriage preparation was not required in the diocese in which he or she was married but, being a recent convert to the

Catholic faith, realized this would be an excellent opportunity to develop a better understanding of the Catholic teachings on marriage. It was also an opportunity to get to know better his or her partner.

Two respondents wrote that marriage preparation is a very important step in preparing for life as a married couple. Both of these stated that they wanted to prepare themselves as best they could before the wedding. Another respondent stated the expectation that marriage preparation would be beneficial to their relationship.

Questions 9 and 10 were designed to ascertain whether respondents found marriage preparation helpful and at what time in their relationship the program had an impact. Question 9 asked participants to rate their marriage preparation program with choices ranging from very unhelpful to very helpful. Of those responding to this question, 82% found their marriage preparation program to be helpful or very helpful.

Question 10 asked participants "if they found the program helpful or very helpful, was the information useful or relevant." Thirty (65%) respondents believed the program had an impact on them during the program and immediately following. Twenty-three (50%) found the program more beneficial during the first two years of marriage. Sixteen (35%) of the respondents found the program of benefit sometime after the second year of their marriage; that is, the topics discussed in the marriage preparation program were drawn upon by these respondents more than two years after the wedding.

Although neither question provided space for written answers, three respondents contributed personal reactions. In response to question 9, one respondent stated that the impact of the program was minimal due

to a lack of support and follow-up while another stated the program was helpful beyond the scope of the marriage relationship. This respondent found that the program helped her or him in understanding others better. A respondent reacting to question 10 stated that as a couple, they still used some of the skills that were learned in the program.

Question 11 asked respondents to identify one or more topics or themes from their marriage preparation program they believed to be most helpful. Seventeen (37%) respondents were unable to identify or recall any topics or themes. Twenty-five (57%) were able to identify one or more themes or topics discussed in their marriage preparation program that they found helpful. The 57% who responded to this question offered a total of 42 responses. Table 4-3 represents these topics.

The largest number of respondents (9 or 36%) believed the most helpful or memorable theme presented in their marriage preparation program was communication. Seven (28%) respondents indicated that money management was a theme from their marriage preparation program that impacted their relationship. Four individuals distinguishing it as a helpful theme mentioned sexuality. Natural family planning, spirituality of marriage, conflict resolution, parenting, expectations in marriage, sacrament of marriage, and goals in marriage all received mention by two respondents as being themes that had a helpful impact on their relationship. The remaining topics were mentioned only once.

Two respondents stated they could not remember specific themes, although they believed the themes were helpful. One respondent related a highlight of the program being keynote speakers (an obstetrician and a

Table 4-3
Identification of Themes Believed to be Helpful
in Marriage Preparation Programs
(N=25)

Responses	n	%
1. communication	9	36
2. money management	7	28
3. sexuality	4	16
4. natural family planning	2	8
5. spirituality of marriage	2	8
6. conflict resolution	2	8
7. parenting	2	8
8. expectations of marriage	2	8
9. sacrament of marriage	2	8
10. goals in marriage	2	8
11. compromising	1	4
12. problem solving	1	4
13. interchurch marriages	1	4
14. commitment	1	4
15. legal issues	1	4
16. child birth	1	4
17. working together	1	4
18. facilitators sharing experiences	1	4

lawyer). Another respondent related that the program helped her to deal with previous miscarriages. A respondent who could not identify a topic or theme suggested this was due to the fact the he "had blinders on so could not remember the themes. She was the one I wanted to spend the rest of my life with and still is."

Questions 12 and 13 were designed to establish whether respondents were currently involved in marriage preparation programs as a participant, presenter, facilitator or organizer. In response to question 12, only 2 (2%) indicated that they were currently enrolled in a marriage preparation program.

Question 13 asked respondents if they were or ever had been presenters, facilitators or organizers of marriage preparation programs. Twenty-six (23%) responded that they were or had been involved in administering marriage preparation programs. Due to the wording of the question, it is impossible to distinguish whether these respondents are currently involved in marriage preparation or were involved in the past.

This second section of the questionnaire, questions 5 - 13, was important in adding a qualitative dimension to the remaining questions. It highlighted whether the respondents had taken a marriage preparation program, when they had done so and the program they had taken. It determined why respondents had taken marriage preparation programs and whether they had found their program helpful or unhelpful. These questions described the subjective impact felt by the respondent and isolated topics or themes of greatest interest or assistance. One question identified whether the respondents were currently taking or had assisted in presenting marriage preparation programs.

Content Opinions

Content opinions were the focus of questions 14 and 15. Although the questionnaire consisted of twenty questions, one question stands out as being of primary importance in providing information for this study. Question 14, a two-part question asking the opinions of respondents in regard to themes or topics considered important to marriage preparation programs, was the primary question of this study. However, the remaining 18 questions in the survey were important in providing supportive information in reference to program development.

Part (a). The first part of the question asked respondents to choose five topics or themes they believed to be the most important and that should be included in all marriage preparation programs. Participants were not asked to rank order their preferences, simply to check five. A list of twenty-five themes or topics was presented which were identified from the preliminary survey. Table 4-4 presents the complete results of responses to the first part of question 14.

Of the 115 respondents, a strong majority of 99 (86%) indicated "communication" was an important theme that should be addressed in all marriage preparation programs. "The sacrament of marriage" was ranked second by respondents with 56 (49%) individuals choosing this theme as important. The next four most frequently selected themes were of near or equal importance for these Catholic Church members. "Conflict resolution" received the next highest number of check marks (46 or 40%) followed by "God in marriage" and "finances" which each received 44 (38%) individuals suggesting the inclusion of these themes in all marriage

Table 4-4

Most Important Topics and Themes that should be Included in all Marriage Preparation Programs
(N=115)

Topic or theme	n checked	% checked	Rank
communication	99	86	1
sacrament of marriage	56	49	2
conflict resolutions	46	40	3
finances	44	38	4.5
God in marriage	44	38	4.5
expectations of marriage	42	37	6
problems in marriage	21	18	7
spirituality	19	17	8
sexuality	18	16	9.5
our differences	18	16	9.5
starting a family	17	15	11
roles in marriage	15	13	13
defining love	15	13	13
intimacy	15	13	13
interchurch marriage	13	11	15
anger management	12	10	16
theology of marriage	10	9	17
parenting (blended families)	8	7	18
marital or family violence	6	5	19
dual career lifestyles	5	4	20
the wedding ceremony	4	4	21.5
leisure activities	4	4	21.5
legal issues in marriage	2	2	23
bible study	1	1	24.5
extended family (in-laws)	1	1	24.5

preparation programs. "Expectations of marriage" was considered important by 42 (37%) respondents.

It is important to indicate the distinction in marriage preparation programs between "God in marriage" and "the sacrament of marriage." God in marriage addresses the couple relationship and the expression of love in that relationship as being God's plan for marriage. The sacrament of marriage addresses marriage as one of the seven signs or symbols of the Catholic Church and emphasizes the effect that one marriage has on others as a model of Christian Catholic marriage. The respondents to the questionnaire, having been involved in the Synod process and from their general involvement in the Catholic Church, are assumed to understand this distinction.

The remaining nineteen themes or topics received fewer than twenty-five (22%) responses each. "Extended family" and "Bible study" each received only one response signifying that fewer than 1% of respondents believed these themes should be included in all marriage preparation programs.

Part (b). The second part of question 14 asked respondents to indicate their agreement of inclusion of these 25 themes or topics on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). There were varying numbers of responses to this request. Some rated only those they chose as important in the first part of the question while others omitted some themes. Table 4-5 summarizes the responses to part b of question 14. Percentages were rounded off for ease of interpretation.

Table 4-5

Level of Agreement as to Whether Each Topic or Theme should be Included in all Marriage Preparation Programs

	SD 1		D 2		U 3		A 4		SA 5		
Topic or theme	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	Rank
communication (n=111)	-	-	-	-	1	1	5	5	105	95	1
sacrament of marriage (n=108)	-	-	-	-	4	4	36	33	68	63	2
God in marriage (n=106)	-	-	-	-	3	3	41	39	59	60	3
expectations of marriage (n=106)	-	-	1	1	2	2	45	43	58	55	4.5
conflict resolutions (n=104)	-	-	1	1	4	4	40	39	59	57	4.5
spirituality (n=103)	-	-	-	-	3	3	54	52	46	45	6
finances (n=104)	-	-	1	1	15	14	35	34	53	51	7
sexuality (n=103)	-	-	2	2	5	5	60	58	36	35	8
our differences (n=104)	-	-	2	2	9	9	54	52	39	38	9
roles in marriage (n=104)	-	-	-	-	14	14	56	54	34	33	10.5
starting a family (n=101)	-	-	3	3	8	8	57	56	33	33	10.5
intimacy (n=101)	-	-	2	2	9	9	59	58	31	31	12

Table 4-5 continued

Topic or theme	SD 1		D 2		U 3		A 4		SA 5		Rank
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
problems in marriage (n=103)	-	-	3	3	13	13	53	52	34	33	13
defining love (n=100)	1	1	-	-	19	19	53	53	27	27	14
anger management (n=101)	-	-	6	6	18	18	48	48	29	29	15
interchurch marriage (n=101)	-	-	2	2	23	23	51	51	25	25	16
theology of marriage (n=98)	1	1	2	2	22	22	49	50	24	25	17
marital or family violence (n=100)	-	-	8	8	24	24	45	45	23	23	18
parenting (blended families) (n=101)	-	-	8	8	25	25	49	49	19	29	19
dual career lifestyles (n=100)	-	-	13	13	22	22	46	46	19	19	20
extended family (in-laws) (n=100)	-	-	9	9	26	26	59	59	6	6	21.5
the wedding ceremony (n=99)	3	3	9	9	23	23	52	53	12	12	21.5
legal issues in marriage (n=100)	-	-	10	10	37	37	43	43	10	10	23
leisure activities (n=99)	4	4	15	15	34	34	39	39	7	7	24
bible study (n=102)	2	2	16	16	43	42	37	36	4	4	25

As in part a of question 14, communication was again overwhelmingly indicated as important content for marriage preparation programs. Of the 115 respondents, there were 111 responses to this theme. Of these responses, 110 (100%) either strongly agreed (95%) or agreed (5%) that this theme should be an integral part of all marriage preparation programs. It is significant that in part b of question 14, respondents ranked themes or topics very similarly to their identification in part a of the same question. The theme with the next highest response was sacrament of marriage which received 108 responses. Of these, 63% of respondents strongly agreed with its inclusion while 33% agreed, for a combined total of 96% strongly suggesting sacrament of marriage should be part of all marriage preparation programs.

God in marriage received 106 responses which included 60% respondents strongly agreeing, 39% agreeing, and 3% being unsure as to whether this theme should be included in all marriage preparation programs. Expectations of marriage was fourth in the number of responses procuring 106 responses of which 58 (55%) strongly agreed with its inclusion and 45 (43%) agreed. One hundred and four individuals responded to the fifth theme which was conflict resolution. Here, 59 (57%) strongly agreed while 40 (39%) agreed with incorporating this theme.

Bible study and leisure activities were ranked last. Of the 102 individuals responding to the theme of Bible study, only 4 (4%) strongly agreed it should be included in all marriage preparation programs. Only thirty-seven (36%) agreed with its inclusion. Leisure activities received only 99 responses. Seven (7%) strongly agreed that this theme should be an important component of all marriage preparation programs. Only

thirty-nine (39%) agreed this theme should be included. More than half of the respondents were unsure or disagreed that leisure activities should be included in all marriage preparation programs.

Additional content opinion comments. Some of the respondents provided additional comments to question 14, although it was not requested and no space was provided. Of the 115 surveys returned, 11 respondents chose to elaborate on their choices and ratings in this question. Two respondents suggested that all the topics or themes should be considered as part of marriage preparation programs. One of these individuals further elaborated on this response by expressing concern over the length of a marriage preparation program that would incorporate all the listed themes or topics.

Some of the comments were particular to specific themes or topics. One individual indicated that interchurch and blended families should be optional as they pertain to specific couples and would not directly affect those not involved in these situations. One respondent clarified her or his choice of unsure for many themes as being due to "ignorance" of what the theme or topic entailed. However, she or he also stated that if "numbers warranted" the inclusion of these themes or topics, they should be included. Four respondents suggested that many of the themes or topics could be grouped together, thereby shortening the list and incorporating more themes in the marriage preparation program. For example, themes such as anger management, problems in marriage, marital or family violence and conflict resolution could be combined under one heading. God in marriage, sacrament and theology of marriage could also be combined. One of these respondents also suggested that themes such as starting a family, parenting, Bible study, extended family (in-laws),

interchurch marriage, and dual career lifestyles could be addressed in courses after marriage when they would be more timely for the couple.

Other Suggested Themes

The next question (question 15) also related to content opinion and asked respondents to identify other themes or topics that should be included in marriage preparation programs, but were not listed in question 14. Of those responding to this question, over half (52%) perceived the list as complete. Thirty-seven (46%) respondents offered specific themes or topics which they believed were overlooked. These are reported in Table 4-6 with the frequency noted.

Many of the suggested themes could be combined. Others could be combined with themes mentioned in question 14. For example, starting a family and parenting were listed in question 14 and could conceivably be combined and/or incorporated with natural family planning, having children, and adoption.

In summary, for content of marriage preparation programs, it is obvious that respondents believe that all marriage preparation programs should address the theme of communication. These respondents also suggest that all marriage preparation programs should address the topics of sacrament of marriage, God in marriage, finances, conflict resolution and expectations of marriage. Conversely, these respondents did not indicate that Bible study and leisure activities should be included in all marriage preparation programs.

Table 4-6

Important Themes or Topics Suggested
by Respondents not included in Q. 14
(N=37)

Theme or Topic	n	%
having children	5	14
general approach to Christian Marriage	4	11
natural family planning	4	11
commitment	3	9
readiness for marriage	3	6
family of origin	2	6
support groups	2	6
adapting to change	2	6
forgiveness	2	6
self-sacrifice	2	6
health	2	6
male/female differences	2	6
ending the marriage	1	3
maintaining your relationship	1	3
adoption	1	3
loss of employment	1	3
praying together as a couple	1	3
jealousy and insecurity	1	3
role of culture	1	3
holidays	1	3
affects of drug/alcohol abuse	1	3
celebration in marriage	1	3
cohabitation	1	3
compromise	1	3
dreaming	1	3
how to bow out gracefully before the wedding	1	3

Administrative Issues

The final five questions (questions 16 - 20) related to administration of marriage preparation programs. The answers to these questions can provide necessary guidance for program developers in the administration aspects of marriage preparation programs. Table 4-7 illustrates the responses to these questions. Only two of the questions in this section requested that respondents elaborate on their choices. However, each question had individuals providing written explanations for their choices ranging from 12 written responses in question 18 to 98 written responses to question 20.

The first of these questions was directed at ascertaining when marriage preparation should begin. According to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, preparation for marriage should begin within the family during childhood (CCCB, 1996). However, church sponsored marriage preparation is presented during the engagement, usually just prior to the wedding. Participants were provided with four choices: junior high school or earlier, high school, at the time of engagement, or just prior to marriage. The majority of responses (48%) to this question indicated that a church sponsored marriage preparation program should begin at the time of engagement. However, 34% of those responding suggested that high school is the appropriate time frame for beginning church sponsored marriage preparation. Only 11% believed it should begin at the junior high school level or earlier, while only 7% thought the best time was just prior to marriage.

Table 4-7

Administrative Issues
(N=115)

Characteristic	n	%
Best Time to Begin Marriage Prep		
at the time of engagement	52	48
high school	37	34
junior high school or earlier	12	11
just prior to marriage	7	7
Best Format		
once a week (6-10 weeks)	37	35
evenings + weekend (Fri., Sat. and Sun.)	30	28
evenings + weekend (Fri. and Sat.)	17	16
one weekend	12	11
two weekends	10	9
Best Time		
Monday, pm	33	29
Tuesday, pm	44	38
Wednesday, pm	41	36
Thursday, pm	30	26
Friday, pm	17	15
Saturday, am	26	23
Saturday, afternoon	18	16
Sunday, am	3	3
Sunday, afternoon	17	1
Note: Respondents were asked for 3 choices		
Instructional Activities		
a combination	92	84
small group discussions	14	13
lectures	2	2
reading and answering questions	1	1
other	1	1
Should There be Ongoing Support		
yes	104	92
no	9	8

Thirteen people provided written answers for question 16, although it was not requested. The majority of these responses suggested the importance of providing some form of marriage preparation in the schools, be it at the junior or senior high level. It was suggested that programs beginning at this level could be more general in nature with a more specific follow-up program offered prior to the marriage. Marriage preparation in the schools could be incorporated into existing programs such as Christian Family Life or Education in Sexuality and could include such topics or themes as social commitment, decision making, communication and understanding our feelings. One respondent suggested that by providing information to junior and senior high school students, the process of marriage preparation prior to the wedding could be shortened.

In question 17, participants were asked to state their preference as to the format of marriage preparation programs. One hundred and six individuals answered this question. Thirty-seven (35%) respondents suggested a program that was once a week for six to ten weeks would be the most appropriate. Thirty (28%) believed a combination of evenings and one weekend would be the best format.

Nineteen written responses were recorded for question 17 which asked about the format of marriage preparation programs. One respondent stated that there is no perfect program which will suit the needs of every couple. This was supported by four other individuals who said that the format should be dependent on the couples who are taking the program. Four other individuals said a combination would be the most appropriate. Again, this would depend on the couples. Other

responses ranged from "weekly programs provide more discussion and discernment time for the couples," to "weekend programs should be provided only to those who cannot attend a week day program," to "weekend programs can most probably cover only five topics thoroughly whereas more topics could be addressed in a ten week program." It was also suggested that ten weeks might not be enough time. An observation presented by one individual was that rural parishes have to take into account the amount of travel required by its couples. This was reiterated in response to question 18 as well which pertained to the best time of the week for a program offered weekly.

Question 18 asked participants to determine the best time of the week for a weekly marriage preparation program by indicating their top three choices. According to the data, the best time of the week for a weekly marriage preparation program would be Tuesday (38%) or Wednesday evening (36%) and Monday and Thursday evening with 29% and 26% respectively (see Table 4-7).

Of the twelve respondents submitting written replies to this question, four suggested that a variety of different times would best serve the needs of all engaged couples. Again, as in the previous question, respondents stated that the timing should depend on the needs of the couples registering for marriage preparation programs. Although there is never a perfect time for these programs, the results of the survey are consistent with the statements written by respondents; that is, Friday evening is the least favourable evening and Sunday morning the least favourable of all the provided choices. As was also mentioned previously, rural parishes have to take into account the amount of travel that may be required for those outside the urban centers. One respondent wrote that

the choices were personal and therefore, may not be in accordance with the choices of others.

Question 19 asked participants, for general information, to identify the instructional methods best suited to their learning. The responses to this question could prove to be beneficial to those involved in program development, as instructional techniques are an integral part of program delivery. Only five (4%) participants omitted this question. Eighty-four per cent of those answering this question determined they learned best in a variety of instructional methods. Small group discussions received 14 (13%) responses while the remaining two choices, lectures, and reading and answering questions, received 2 (2%) and 1 (1%) responses respectively.

This question (19) was one of the two questions that requested participants elaborate on their choices. Of the 115 responses to the survey, 72 (62%) respondents added a written response to this question. Most of the responses elaborated on the combination of the listed choices they found best suited their learning method. Twenty-three people suggested that a variety of teaching techniques helps to encourage discussion and prevents boredom. Sixteen individuals explained that lectures followed by large or small group discussions were the most effective for them. One individual explained the most effective learning for her or him was a lecture followed by reading and answering questions. However, this was only if the group in which this person was involved was a non-judgmental group. Another respondent suggested the best learning technique for him or her was a lecture followed by a question period or with candidates posing questions prior to the lecture which would incorporate answers in the presentation.

The method of learning not listed in the choices for question 19 but most often mentioned in the written responses was the use of videos, teleconferencing and other electronic methods of teaching such as on-line programs. Eleven respondents presented these as alternative learning methods. Writing letters, prayer and quiet time for reflection were all mentioned by several respondents. Other suggestions included role playing, selected activities, and journaling. Some respondents suggested resource persons such as lawyers, doctors, priests and married couples presenting information in their area of expertise by way of lecture or personal testimonies is a very effective teaching method. The noticeable statement that dominated the responses to this question is that learners learn best when a variety of teaching methods are employed (Heimlich and Norland, 1994). Each learning method is important and no one method is better than all other methods.

In summary, in response these administrative questions, respondents indicated that marriage preparation should be introduced to students at the high school level but that formal couple preparation should begin at the time of engagement. Most favored weekly programs or a combination of evenings or one weekend, although it was noted that the structure of the program should reflect the availability of the couples. It appears that Tuesday or Wednesday evenings would be the most popular. Those in rural parishes needed travel considerations. In terms of presentation, it appears that a variety of teaching methods are recommended which would include small group discussions, lectures, question periods, videos, guest lecturing, and reading and writing exercises.

Follow-up to Marriage Preparation. As question 20 (should there be ongoing support) received more written responses than any other

question, it merited analysis separate from the previous four administrative issues. This question was a yes or no question with space provided for elaboration on a choice of yes. Only two surveys were returned with no answer to this question. Nine individuals responded "no" to this question. One hundred and four (92%) of the respondents believed there should be some form of ongoing support for couples after marriage.

While 104 individuals believed there should be ongoing support, 98 individuals followed up on their affirmative choice with a written statement. These statements appeared to fall into one of five categories: comments, statements of support, suggestions, time-frame suggestions, and negative statements.

There were four subthemes in the comments received, some being restated by several individuals. One respondent said that a follow-up program to marriage preparation would be a great idea, but stated his or her opinion that so many couples get lost in the crowd, this may a very difficult undertaking. Another individual indicated that a problem with trying to initiate a follow-up program occurred after the couple becomes a family. It is difficult to find the time for a program when one has the responsibilities of a young family. Several individuals stated that if a couple wants support in the form of a program after marriage, they should have access to such a program. Others suggested the first year of marriage is, in their perception, the most difficult and, thus, there should be some form of support to help couples through this time. Five individuals believed follow-up is important, but it should not be obligatory.

The second category of written statements provided by respondents to question 20 was statements of support. Eight individuals stated generally, that there should be some form of support. One suggested that support groups have been beneficial in other aspects of life and, therefore, may also be of benefit to newlyweds and especially for those who may be struggling or contemplating separation. Two individuals believed support programs should be made available to young, immature and emotionally unstable couples, although these terms were not defined. Four respondents thought ongoing support should be strongly encouraged. Another individual suggested that these kinds of programs are definitely important, unless couples believe they have "arrived" on the day of their wedding.

Many suggestions about the type of follow-up were provided. Many suggested the use of newsletters, prayer groups, discussion evenings, and feedback questions as a means of delivering follow-up programs. Twelve individuals noted that sponsor couples be utilized. These sponsor couples would be chosen during the marriage preparation phase and would continue after marriage. One individual labeled these sponsor couples as "guardian angels" of the newlyweds. Many others suggested the best manner in which to provide follow-up after marriage is to encourage participation of young couples in the Christian community. This, they suggested, may be the best form of support and follow-up. Others suggested that involvement in existing groups such as Marriage Encounter, Parent Effectiveness Training, and other parish groups might be the forms of follow-up needed by the couples. One individual suggested that these programs be at a nominal fee or if possible, free as young couples are generally not financially stable.

The fourth category of comments referred to the time frame for follow-up programs. The majority of these statements suggested that the best time for support programs was, generally, in the first few years of the marriage. All of the respondents cited years one, three and/or five as the times when most couples were in need of support. One person also suggested a further follow-up at the ten-year mark of the marriage. Most respondents believed that refresher courses sometime after the marriage would be of great benefit to all marriages, these courses providing support and, as one individual stated, someone with whom to talk.

The final category of responses, with only two comments, suggested that follow-up programs were not needed.

Additional Comments

Other comments written on supplemental pages, in addition to those offered at the specific sections already discussed, were mostly in support of marriage preparation programs. Some individuals believed the Catholic Church was wise in requiring marriage preparation. Others wished they had been more involved in their own program or wished they had been able to take a program. Still others suggested addressing in more detail alcohol, drug or emotional abuse, cohabitation, weaknesses and strengths in the relationship. Despite the fact that ours is a busy society, some respondents thought it important that engaged couples spend the time prior to their marriage discovering each other, getting to know each other, understanding each other's priorities, and responding to problems before the wedding.

Several comments were made pertaining to lecturers and presenters in marriage preparation programs. It was suggested that

these people be credible in regard to the topic which they are presenting. One individual wrote that a priest presented sexuality at their marriage preparation program. Although the presentation was interesting and provided valuable information, the priest had to overcome an initial reaction by the group questioning his ability to speak with authority on the subject of sexuality. Another individual suggested that use of resource people sharing their success stories should be balanced with those who have battled either to save a marriage or end it in order to save the individuals.

Several comments raised the issue of addressing topics that are often neglected by couples during their engagement. Marriage preparation should be the time to address such topics as to whether both partners are ready for the commitment of marriage and fears either partner may have surrounding marriage. A program should help couples to distinguish between what the world sees as marriage and what a truly Christian marriage entails. It should also help those who may decide to postpone or call off the wedding to deal gracefully with their decision and minimize the pain.

Overall, despite the fact that a number of respondents suggested adding other topics to marriage preparation programs, suggested outside speakers, or questioned the expertise of some speakers on some topics, the vast majority of respondents were in favor of marriage preparation programs. These people generally agreed that it was important for engaged couples to learn as much about their prospective spouses before marriage.

Summary

The data support the importance of certain themes in marriage preparation programs; communication, sacrament of marriage, conflict resolution, finances, God in marriage, and expectations of marriage. A weekly format was reported as most administratively favourable with Tuesday and Wednesday being the preferred evenings. Strong interest was reported for the need for post marriage follow-up.

Chapter 5 addresses the summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations from this study

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to study three areas of marriage preparation programs: the themes or content of these programs, the administration of the programs (presenting the programs), and the need for additional support programs after marriage. In addition, it was hoped that the results of this study might assist in making recommendations for continuous development and improvement in those programs.

Chapter five consists of four sections. The first section is a summary of the study. The second section addresses the findings and integrates these findings with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter two. Thirdly, conclusions are outlined and discussed. The final section sets out recommendations based on the data presented in this thesis.

Summary

As noted, this study explored the perception of members of the Edmonton Archdiocese, also largely involved in the Synod process, with regard to themes important to marriage preparation programs. A questionnaire was distributed to 232 members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton by mail on January 6, 1998. The data collection process generated 115 responses for a return rate of 50%. The instrument was developed exclusively for the purposes of this study, and was a four-page questionnaire comprised of multiple choice, rating, and open-ended questions. The responses provided quantitative, descriptive data which

were analyzed using SPSSX. Data from open-ended questions and other comments provided by respondents were included in the analysis of this study.

A summary of the findings from the study is as follows:

- all regions within the Edmonton Archdiocese were represented
- almost equal representation was had from all age groups with the exception of those under the age of 40
- 40% of respondents had taken marriage preparation between 1970 and 1979 in their own parishes
- most respondents took a marriage preparation program because it was required by the Catholic Church
- most respondents found the program helpful either during the program or immediately following
- themes most often recalled were communication, finances and sexuality
- the most important theme in marriage preparation programs is communication
- other important themes include the sacrament of marriage, conflict resolution, finances, God in marriage, expectations of marriage, spirituality and sexuality
- least important themes were Bible study and in-laws
- the six most consistently rated themes were communication, sacrament of marriage, conflict resolution, finances, God in marriage, and expectations of marriage
- themes independently suggested by respondents included cohabitation, the role of culture in marriage, loss of employment, dreaming, support groups, and bowing out gracefully before the wedding day

- the best time to begin formal marriage preparation is at the time of engagement
- respondents prefer a weekly format
- Tuesday and Wednesday evenings appear most convenient
- a variety of instructional methods are most conducive to learning
- there should be ongoing support for marriages after the wedding.

It is recognized that the sample of respondents included a number of persons over the age of 60 and a number of persons who had been married longer than 30 years. These respondents are recognized as being leaders in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton and they are persons who are role models for many young couples. Experience has shown that engaged couples gravitate in marriage preparation programs toward facilitators who have been married for a longer period of time recognizing that these couples have more lived experience to share. For example, the two most popular presenters at the marriage preparation program for the Family Enrichment Center are individuals over the age of 60 years, one of whom has been married for more than 40 years. It is acknowledged that couples of all age groups and levels of marriage experience have unique contributions to make in marriage preparation including topics or themes with which they have more experience.

Findings

The theoretical framework used in this study was based on a combination of Church and secular assumptions. The combined theory, named the **Church in Society theory**, addresses both the Church or spiritual side of relationships as well as the social and emotional aspects when addressing marriage preparation. This theory can provide a foundation for the development of marriage preparation programs in the

Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton as it addresses both the religious and secular needs of engaged couples. A brief summary of the assumptions of the Church in Society theory is as follows:

1. Every couple asking to be married in the Catholic Church has some religious background and, whether consciously recognized or not, wish to expand on the religious component in their relationship;

2. The majority of couples asking to be married in the Catholic Church are interfaith or interdenominational but one or both have some tie to the Catholic Church;

3. The satisfaction level of the individuals within the relationship is dependent upon each individual giving to and receiving rewards from the relationship;

4. Each individual is unique and will interpret the giving and receiving differently; and

5. Past experiences, which include relationships and support of family, will guide subsequent exchanges within the relationship.

The findings of this study support the theoretical framework outlined in the Church in Society theory. Six themes were identified as important components of all marriage preparation programs. These themes represented both the spiritual or Church side of marriage relationships (sacrament of marriage and God in marriage) as well as the secular or social and emotional aspects (communication, conflict resolution, finances and expectations of marriage).

On the spiritual side of this theory, respondents chose the sacrament of marriage and God in marriage as being important components in all marriage preparation programs. These two themes were chosen more often than other listed themes. Addressing these themes contributes to the spiritual growth of the couples, providing the

opportunity for couples to explore the religious component of their relationship and develop a better understanding of the Catholic Church and its traditions. Because the respondents to the survey were not, for the most part, engaged or newlyweds, these themes could be inferred as having developed throughout a lifetime of marriage.

Addressing the social and emotional side of the theory, communication, expectations of marriage, conflict resolution, and finances were also found to be very important to all programs. These four themes relate very strongly to the secular assumptions of the Church in Society theory. They focus on giving and receiving within a relationship (communicating, sharing thoughts and feelings, understanding who we are as individuals within the relationship) and infer that exchanges (how we deal with one another, how we handle conflict and joy) will guide the relationship. Relationships will grow with the support of family and the community (e.g., marriage preparation programs, ongoing support programs after marriage).

A marriage preparation program developed under this theory, the Church in Society theory, will address all the themes or topics respondents indicated through this survey as being important components in all marriage preparation programs. Using solely the CCCB document or the Social Exchange theory to develop a marriage preparation program would result in some significant themes being omitted from the marriage preparation program. Therefore, a marriage preparation program designed solely based upon either the CCCB document or the Social Exchange theory would be deficient in one or more important components. Church teachings and secular components of marriage are both represented in the findings. Therefore, the Church in Society theory may appeal to and have significance for a greater number of participants by

presenting themes or topics that address these properties. The Church in Society theory addresses the deficiencies resultant from sole reliance upon either the CCCB document or the Social Exchange theory by accommodating both aspects of marriage preparation, the church or spiritual component and the secular or social and emotional component.

Conclusions

The sample utilized in this study was drawn largely from a specially convened Synod of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton. These persons were selected to represent their parishes, commissions and agencies throughout the years of the Synod process. They focused over this time specifically on issues of family life, including marriage. As a result, this sample reflected the opinions of persons particularly involved in the Catholic Church and in the study of family life issues. One must, therefore, be cautious in generalizing the results, findings and conclusions of this study to a larger population which would not reflect such level of involvement in the Catholic Church and in the study of family life issues.

The topic of marriage preparation is important to the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton. This also appears to be true for the respondents to this survey. Evidence of this interest is in the time taken by respondents to elaborate on their answers. The unsolicited written response rate was unexpectedly high, ranging from one individual clarifying a choice in one question with a single word to 85% of the respondents writing anywhere from a short statement to a one-page addendum to other questions. This study may have been the first opportunity for individuals to voice their opinions on this subject which is rooted not only in the Church but in the broader spectrum of society.

This interest in marriage preparation is also reflected in the academic commentary. Although less has been written about marriage preparation than other areas addressing relationships (Larson and Holman, 1995), it is recognized that marriage preparation strengthens and supports marriage relationships (Duncan, Box and Silliman, 1996; Russell and Farnden, 1992; Tiesel and Olsen, 1992). Such programs are becoming popular with more couples, and are being required by more church groups at the present time (Johnson, 1995).

The Church in Society theory recognizes this increasing interest in marriage preparation in recognizing that engaged couples, including those which are interfaith or interdenominational, wish to expand and strengthen their relationship from both a secular and spiritual perspective. In the experience of this researcher with marriage preparation, which spans 19 years, couples completing the program are excited about the unique opportunity for communication, the exploration of relationship issues which may be novel to them, and the tools which they may incorporate into a continuing process of living their marriage commitment. In addition, many facilitating couples eagerly anticipate their interaction with the engaged couples and other facilitating couples and the exercises, discussion, and time spent in exploring and sharing their own relationship with others.

The first conclusion of this study is, therefore, that the members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton represented by this sample believe that marriage preparation is of consequence and more opportunity should be provided for discourse on this subject.

In identifying themes which should be included in marriage preparation programs, communication appeared to be the theme most often chosen by respondents (about twice as frequently as the next theme). Three opportunities were afforded respondents to chose themes they believed important, the first opportunity asking what themes participants found most helpful, the second asking the five most important themes from a list of 25, and the third asking agreement with the theme's inclusion in marriage preparation programs. In all three requests, communication stood out as the most significant theme.

This is further supported by the Creighton University study which found that communication was the most critical theme that should be addressed in all marriage preparation programs if these programs are to be effective in enhancing marriage relationships (McCord, 1997). Communication is a strong contributor to marital quality (Burleson and Denton, 1997; Heavey and Larson, 1996; Houck and Daniel, 1994; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 1998) and communication tools may prevent misunderstandings and provide a stronger foundation for the marriage relationship (Boisvert, 1995).

The theoretical framework utilized in this study further identifies a need for solid communication skills in that the satisfaction level of the couple depends upon the giving and receiving of communication and the rewards associated with this exchange which are unique and interpreted individually. This researcher has observed that satisfaction within a relationship varies over time and that periods of greater satisfaction are directly associated with the levels of communication between the partners. As the communication level increases and intensifies, so does the perceived connection between the couple. However, couples must recognize that communication is a broad and complex field and ease of

communication in one aspect of their relationship may not encompass the whole relationship. **The second conclusion of this study, therefore, is that marriage preparation programs should address and emphasize couple communication as a central component of the program.** As communication encompasses many varied aspects, the areas of communication that would be most beneficial to developing relationships may be those that address skills that enable individuals to share on a more intimate level.

Six themes emerged as the most common content choices for marriage preparation by respondents: communication, sacrament of marriage, conflict resolution, God in marriage, finances, and expectations of marriage. In comparing these findings with those found in the Creighton University study of marriage preparation programs, there are some similarities. In the Creighton study, which surveyed over 1,000 married couples, it was discovered that communication, commitment, conflict resolution, children and church were rated as most helpful in marriage preparation programs ("Effective Marriage...", 1995). In comparing this study to the Creighton findings, communication, conflict resolution and church (God in marriage, sacrament of marriage) emerge in both, which may indicate that facilitators of marriage preparation programs should focus on these themes. Commitment could be aligned with expectations of marriage, leaving the themes of children from the Creighton study and finances from this study as differing themes. This may be attributed to the difference in the respondents to each of the studies. The Creighton study surveyed over 1000 couples across the United States who had been married from one to eight years. This study was delimited by choosing members of the Synod (1993) in the Edmonton Archdiocese and further limited by the age of those who responded to the survey. The older respondents from this survey, who had been married

for an average of twenty years, may not have focused on family issues (ie, children) as their experiences may be with older children, the excitement of starting a family a distant memory. The younger respondents involved in the Creighton study may not have found finances to be a priority as they focus on their developing relationship and becoming a family.

Other commentators have also cited themes or topics which could be of benefit to couples contemplating marriage; arrival of the first child, parenting, sharing feelings, and shared goals (Boisvert, 1995; Houck and Daniel, 1994; Russell and Farnden, 1992; Whetstone, 1996). Facilitating couples must select themes which will meet the needs of their couples and the requirements of their sponsoring organization (Larson and Holman, 1995). In the writers experience, the themes additional to communication, God in marriage, and the sacrament of marriage, which are of most interest and benefit to participating couples includes expectations of marriage, sexuality, and conflict resolution. It has been apparent to this researcher that although many couples contemplating marriage believe that they have addressed these topics or themes with their partners prior to taking marriage preparation, the have done so only superficially. They do not have a solid comprehensive understanding as to what they expect and what their partner expects from marriage and how to address divergences in these expectations. They have not explored differences in their expectations of sexuality in marriage and how sexuality will comprise a part of the whole of their marriage. They may not have addressed in any detail how they will react to conflict, disputes, anger, and confrontation in their marriage. Unless couples contemplating marriage have explored these areas thoroughly, it is this researcher's observation that they have not fully prepared themselves for a healthy and lengthy married life.

The Church in Society theory arises out of a recognition that there is a need to address themes of both a spiritual and secular nature. Each Catholic marriage preparation program must address a couple's desire to investigate or expand upon the religious component of their relationship, if such a desire exists, and their tie to the Catholic Church while at the same time allowing individuals to draw upon their past experiences, relationships and family background to guide exchanges within their relationship. Personal observation has shown that a healthy marital relationship allows for discussion, sharing and growth in many dimensions of relationship; interpersonal, spiritual and practical. Being able to address conflicts as they arise, balance realistic expectations with available resources, and the opportunity to share oneself on different planes, including one's relationship with one's God, makes for a well-rounded and more complete marital relationship. **The third conclusion as a result of this study is that marriage preparation programs should address those additional themes of a religious nature; sacrament of marriage and God in marriage, and those additional themes of a secular nature; conflict resolution, finances and expectations of marriage as part of a balanced marriage preparation program.** This selection of additional themes is a reflection of the participants of this study and should not be considered to limit other topics or themes of importance.

Theory guides researchers in their fields of study helping to frame a topic and provide focus (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm and Steinmetz, 1993). The theory presented in this study, the Church in Society theory, combines the church (or spiritual aspect of marriage preparation) and the secular (or social and emotional aspects). In reviewing the six previously mentioned themes that appeared to be most helpful to couples, it appears that these themes fit within the theoretical framework. By addressing

God in marriage and sacrament of marriage in marriage preparation programs, the program falls under two assumptions from the Church in Society theory (the need for couples asking to be married in the Catholic Church to explore the religious component of their relationship and that there was some connection to the Catholic Church) and, thereby, address the spiritual component of marriage preparation, a component that may not exist in premarital programs outside religious organizations. The remaining themes, communication, conflict resolution, finances, and expectations of marriage, address the needs of the couples to explore the interpersonal (or societal) component of their relationship. These secular themes can be a part of marriage preparation programs outside the Church but are also important to all relationships and, therefore, should be included in Church-sponsored programs. With the scope of the study determined by the theoretical framework, the questions in this study produced responses that fell within the focus of the theory.

It is the view of this researcher that as in all things, balance is essential. This is also true for marriage preparation programs. It is the personal balance between God and work, the spiritual and the secular, the sacrament of marriage and the celebration of the wedding ceremony that brings equilibrium to a marriage relationship. The Aristotelian mean in marriage should incorporate all aspects of relationship if it is to remain multi-dimensional and fulfilling. From personal experience, emphasis on either the spiritual or secular components of marriage, to the exclusion of the other, leaves a void in the relationship. **It could, therefore, be concluded that the Church in Society theory appears to be an important approach to Catholic marriage preparation programs. The six major themes confirmed that both the spiritual and social**

dimension of marriage preparation need to be addressed in these programs.

This is not to say that the guidelines or assumptions outlined in the CCCB document could not benefit the development of a successful marriage preparation program, but rather, there existed a need for a theoretical framework that would include the spiritual, social and emotional needs of engaged couples. As well, past experience has shown that contrary to the understanding of the CCCB document, most couples asking for marriage within the Catholic Church are interfaith, interdenominational or non-practicing Catholics (Turlock, M., personal communication, October, 1997). Thus, if marriage preparation is to be of benefit to all couples seeking marriage in the Catholic Church, it must include a broader base than that proposed by the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops.

In response to administrative issues, these findings indicated that marriage preparation programs would best serve the needs of engaged couples in a weekly format. The understanding gained from this study suggested that weekly programs (with Tuesday or Wednesday evenings being the most convenient) provide a better opportunity to address themes in greater depth as was suggested. The time between sessions affords couples the opportunity to absorb the concepts presented, discuss the themes as they relate to their own relationship, and bring questions back to the group for the next session (Ness, T, personal communication, November, 1997). It also provides the opportunity for couples to set aside time during the week to discuss their relationship and spend time together without distractions. However, it must be re-stated that these results are a reflection of the sample for this study, based upon Synod Assembly attendance and reflecting an older respondent group and ,

therefore, may not be directly referable to the couples currently enrolled in marriage preparation programs.

Couple satisfaction level with a marriage preparation program is dependent upon program presentation, exercises, timing of sessions (Russell and Farnden, 1992), price, place, travel distance, and title (Duncan, Box and Silliman, 1996). The results of this study indicated that in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton at this time, weekly programs best address these concerns. This researcher has observed that preferences in administrative formats vary by location and over time. Flexibility and communication with couples involved in marriage preparation programs will allow the administrative components of the program to best meet the needs of participants. **Currently, according to the participants of this study, the fifth conclusion is that weekly marriage preparation sessions may be the best format for marriage preparation, by providing more opportunity for communication, contemplation, and inquiry into the relationship between the couple.** However, flexibility and ongoing evaluation are essential to ensure that administrative structure enhances the marriage preparation program for the attending couples. Determining the needs of those whom marriage preparation programs hope to serve requires more study if it is to be reflective of a changing society and the changing needs of engaged couples. Technology (video conferencing and internet) may play a more prominent role in the delivery of these programs in the future. It is the view of this researcher, however, that personal contact between facilitators and engaged couples is more effective than the remote connections of correspondence learning.

As concluded previously, marriage preparation programs are most effective during the engagement, immediately after and perhaps in the

first years of marriage. Ninety per cent of the respondents to the survey believed there should be some Church support for couples later in marriage. The type of support, the timing of such support, and whether that support should be mandatory or optional was not clearly indicated. However, many of the respondents noted that newsletters, prayer groups, discussion evenings, feedback questions, and couple sponsorship for couples married one to five, and ten years after marriage would be beneficial.

Support for continuing communication and inter-relationship skills is needed throughout the marriage relationship to sustain a stable and durable partnership (Tiesel and Olsen, 1992; Gleick, 1995). The changing character of marriage and social trends in relationships requires ongoing support for couples adapting to these changes (McCloskey, 1993). In addition, respondents believed that the Church should encourage couple participation in such programs as Marriage Encounter and Parent Effectiveness Training. McCord (1997) found that there was a rising interest in marriage education for those married one to five years, for couples entering a second marriage, and especially for those blending families. These developmental periods may result in vulnerability to divorce and these programs, designed to make a good marriage better and to strengthen or revitalize the couple relationship, may be of help during these vulnerable times.

The theoretical framework for this study recognizes that past experiences guide subsequent exchanges within a relationship. Ongoing marriage enrichment is necessary to incorporate those experiences and facilitates those exchanges as they occur. In the researcher's own relationship, participation in National and Worldwide Marriage Encounter, facilitation of marriage preparation programs, couple retreats and workshops has been instrumental in allowing for a continual

evolution and relationship development. Observation shows that those couples who continue to strive to better their relationship and expand their understanding of their relationship, enjoy a greater degree of satisfaction and happiness in their marriage.

As the Church has a vested interest in the development of the marriage relationship through marriage preparation programs, it is logical that they continue their investment in the maintenance of strong, healthy and happy marriages. **Consequently, the sixth conclusion of this study based upon survey responses and current literature is that the Church should encourage programs that provide ongoing support for marriages. This follow-up may occur one to five, and ten years into marriage and should be designed to strengthen and revitalize generally secure relationships.**

Recommendations

This segment of the chapter is organized into four sections: recommendations for the parish, the Church, theory, and practice.

Recommendations for the parish. Twenty-one per cent of respondents who had taken a marriage preparation program did so in their own parish. This was the largest percentage, as more respondents indicated enrollment in their own parish marriage preparation program than in other available programs. As these respondents also found marriage preparation helpful, it appears that these programs were successful. If the goals of marriage preparation within the Catholic Church include not only preparation of couples for the sacrament of marriage but also evangelization or welcoming of the participants to the

Church, then the most logical place for this program to take place is within the parish to which these couples will belong after their wedding. This also provides the opportunity for the church community to become involved with the couples before the wedding and to support them both before and after the ceremony. Already in the Edmonton Archdiocese, there is in place a strategy in which the Family Enrichment Center will train individuals to become marriage preparation facilitators so they may take a program back to their own parish and serve the needs of the couples within their area. In addition, the most logical location for follow-up after the marriage is in the community in which the couple resides and celebrates; the parish. A parish-sponsored marriage preparation program provides continuity from marriage preparation through wedding on through to follow-up. Even if the wedding ceremony takes place in a remote parish, such as the parish of the parents of the bride or groom, marriage preparation maintains greatest continuity and contact with the couple when it is offered in the parish in which the couple will reside after the marriage.

In addition, parish marriage preparation programs have the advantage of involving a wide variety of couples within the parish in program preparation, administration, sponsorship and presentation. The benefits of the marriage preparation program, therefore, extend beyond the engaged couple throughout the broader marriage community.

Finally, parish marriage preparation creates a network of support couples who are introduced to each other as engaged couples or as married couples sharing the same experiences in the same community. This commonality of experience within the community increases and strengthens the Church by creating a sense of support in community.

The recommendation for the parishes, therefore, arising from this study, is that all parishes within the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton should undertake to develop, administer, and present marriage preparation programs and marriage follow-up programs within their own parish.

Recommendations for the Church. The Edmonton Archdiocese has provided marriage preparation programs for approximately fifty years and has required marriage preparation for over twenty-five years. The Family Enrichment Center has been providing central marriage preparation for over ten years and over the past five years, the Synod on the Family has underlined the importance of marriage preparation. In 1996, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops assigned a high priority to the development of marriage preparation programs. There is no doubt that the Catholic Church, particularly in the Edmonton Archdiocese, being the first Catholic diocese in Canada to require marriage preparation, has recognized the importance of marriage preparation and has directed considerable resources and thought to the development and presentation of those programs. **The first recommendation for the Church, arising from this study, is that it continues to recognize the importance of marriage preparation to the Church and the Catholic community and continue to designate significant resources to the development and presentation of these programs.**

The CCCB document, while addressing carefully the religious and spiritual component of marriage preparation and providing a thoughtful guide to marriage preparation programs, fails to recognize that most couples asking to be married in the Catholic church are interfaith, interdenominational, or non-practicing Catholics. It assumes that

individuals have had strong family support during childhood and adolescence, a strong faith background, and a continuing religious commitment. Many couples asking to be married in the Catholic church have few or none of these characteristics. Conversely, a large number of couples have a degree of interdependence in their relationship, understand the need for giving and receiving from their relationship, and are guided by their past experiences in forming their own couple relationship. The Church in Society theory attempts to combine the strengths and attributes of the CCCB document with the practical sociological realities of the Social Exchange theory. **The second recommendation for the Church arising from this study is that the development of marriage preparation programs be based upon a broader realistic theory of relationship such as the Church in Society theory.**

In the recommendations for parishes mentioned previously, the advantages of parish-based marriage preparation programs were listed. The Family Enrichment Center is currently involved in training facilitators for and encouraging the establishment of parish-based marriage preparation programs. **The third recommendation for the Church from this study is that it continue to promote parish-based marriage preparation programs, train facilitators for those programs and, where necessary, continue to provide central marriage preparation programs for those parishes without programs.**

This study found that six themes should be included in all marriage preparation programs: communication, sacrament of marriage, conflict resolution, God in marriage, finances, and expectations of marriage. **The fourth recommendation for the Church is that it communicates to**

all marriage preparation presenters and parishes these six themes which should be included in every marriage preparation program. Because each parish and each marriage preparation program will be unique to fit the circumstances and to best serve the people of the parish, each program may vary in actual presentation, addressing more themes or addressing these themes in different ways. However, each parish and program should be encouraged to cover these six essential themes thoroughly as the core of a marriage preparation program thereby providing some commonality to all programs within the Edmonton Archdiocese.

This study concluded that formal couple preparation should begin at the time of engagement, that format should consist of weekly programs, and should consist of a variety of teaching methods including small group discussions, lectures, question periods, videos, guest lecturers and reading and writing exercises. **The fifth recommendation of this study for the Church is that it communicates these administrative issues to all parishes and those involved in marriage preparation.** However, it is further recommended that each parish assess the needs of its own couples contemplating marriage and ensure that the needs and expectations of those couples, with regard to administrative issues, be met.

Recommendation for Theory. The Church in Society theory is a combination of the CCCB document and the Social Exchange theory. This new theory, although developed for the Catholic Church, is an ecumenical theory: that is, it does not contain strictly Catholic ideologies but rather encompasses a broader, more spiritual domain. Therefore, any faith developing a marriage preparation program may adopt this theory. **Thus, it is the recommendation of this study for theory that the Church**

in Society theory be considered when developing marriage preparation programs in other faiths.

Recommendations for Practice. Many of the findings in this study had relevance to administering marriage preparation programs. When to begin formal marriage preparation, the format, the instructional methods, the six most common themes, and follow-up programs were all addressed in this study and appeared to generate common opinions among the respondents. **It is, therefore, recommended that information from this study that pertains to these areas (when to begin, format, instructional methods, common themes and follow-up) be made available to those presenting or contemplating instituting marriage preparation programs.**

Recommendations for Research. As indicated previously, the sample utilized in this study was drawn from participants in the Synod process. The Archbishop of Edmonton recommended this sample, as this was the only opportunity in this century to survey a sample of this nature. In order to test the validity and reliability of sample responses, this survey could be repeated with engaged and newlywed couples. **Therefore, it is recommended that future research focus on younger respondents (young couples, newlyweds) in order to discern their perceptions and compare the results of that research with those contained in this study.**

Synopsis

This study reviewed marriage preparation in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, summarized current programs, determined what themes should be offered in all marriage preparation programs

within the Archdiocese, explored the administration of marriage preparation, and confirmed the need for marriage enrichment and support programs after marriage. This study reviewed the current Church theory of marriage preparation (the CCCB document), a prominent human ecology theory (the Social Exchange theory), and proposed a new theory which is a combination of these two theories (the Church in Society theory).

The Church in Society theory addresses both the religious/spiritual aspects and the social/emotional aspects of marriage preparation. In addition, the Church in Society theory recognizes the reality of couples asking to be married in the Catholic Church. It does not assume a strong family upbringing, religious background and commitment, nor does it assume that the social and emotional aspects of relationships can exist without the spiritual. The Church in Society theory further recognizes interfaith, interdenominational, and non-practicing Catholics as a substantial component of those asking to be married in the Catholic Church.

Figure 6 provides a synopsis of the study results, to support this expanded, and thus more appropriate, theory for today's Catholic marriage preparation programs.

It is theorized that the conclusions and recommendations may be a reflection of the views of the members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton and identify those attributes of marriage preparation programs which make them successful in helping to create strong and healthy marriage relationships and a strong and healthy Church. If these recommendations are implemented, they may reinforce the importance of

marriage preparation programs and introduce some commonality and/or uniformity in these programs in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton.

This study has indicated that marriage preparation programs can be a valuable tool in preparing couples for their joint journey through life it they contain appropriate content, format, administrative structure, and follow-up.

Figure 6: Synopsis of Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

1. Marriage preparation is of consequence to members of the Edmonton Archdiocese represented by this sample and more opportunity for discourse is needed on this subject;

2. All marriage preparation programs should address and emphasize couple communication as a central component of the program;

3. In addition to communication, all marriage preparation programs should address sacrament of marriage, conflict resolution, God in marriage, finances and expectations of marriage;

4. The Church in Society theory appears to be an important approach to marriage preparation programs as it provides for both the spiritual and social dimension of marriage preparation;

5. Weekly marriage preparation sessions are most conducive to the goals of marriage preparation, providing opportunity for communication, contemplation and inquiry into the relationship; and

6. The Church should encourage programs after marriage to provide ongoing couple support, to strengthen and revitalize generally secure relationships

Recommendations:

1. All parishes within the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton should undertake a program to develop, administer, and present marriage preparation programs and marriage follow-up programs within their own parish;

2. The Church continue to recognize the importance of marriage preparation and continue to designate significant resources to the development and presentation of these programs;

(continued)

Figure 6 continued

3. The development of marriage preparation programs be based upon a theory of relationship broader and more socially conscious than that which is contained within the CCCB document, such as the Church in Society theory;

4. The Church should promote parish based marriage preparation programs, train facilitators for these programs, and continue to provide central marriage preparation programs for those parishes which cannot establish and present their own programs;

5. The Church should communicate to all parishes the six themes identified in this study and recommend that they form the core of marriage preparation programs;

6. The Church should communicate to all parishes the administrative recommendations identified in this study;

7. The Church in Society theory be considered for the development of marriage preparation programs in other faiths;

8. All presenters be provided with information gathered by this study in regard to starting marriage preparation programs, format, instructional methods, themes, and follow-up; and

9. Future research focus on younger age groups.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Intent

Archbishop Joseph MacNeil
Catholic Pastoral Center
8421 - 101 Ave.
Edmonton, Alta.

Your Grace,

As you know, I recently resigned my position as Chair of the Family Enrichment Center in order to pursue a Masters of Education at the University of Alberta. I am nearing the completion of my course work in the program and have begun the preparation stage for my thesis. Upon considerable reflection, I would like to focus my thesis on marriage preparation within the Archdiocese of Edmonton with specific regard to determining the present status of existing programs and, hopefully, concluding with recommendations for program development based upon the information gathered.

With this letter, I would like to formally seek your approval as this research will involve the people of your Archdiocese. I am requesting a formal reply which I will keep on record and use as a means of introduction for the parishes and individuals I will approach.

Thank-you for your kind consideration and support for this project. I would be pleased to keep you informed of my progress and will present you with the final draft upon completion (for which I am truly looking forward!).

Yours in Christ,

Mona-Lee Feehan

Office of the Archbishop

8421 - 101ST AVENUE
EDMONTON, ALBERTA
T6A 0L1

CRESCAMUS
IN CHRISTUM

March 4, 1997

Mrs. Mona-Lee Feehan
10638 - 25A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6J 4K3

Dear Mona-Lee:

I acknowledge receipt yesterday of your letter seeking my approval for your research project at the University of Alberta focusing on "marriage preparation within the Archdiocese of Edmonton, etc."

It gives me great pleasure to accede to your request. I do this because of the very significant involvement that you and Kevin have had over the years in our Archdiocesan Marriage Preparation Program. You have earned our respect, trust, and gratitude through your position as Chair of the Archdiocesan Family Enrichment Centre.

May your thesis be of great service to those preparing for marriage in this Archdiocese and elsewhere.

Sincerely,

J. N. MacNeil
Archbishop of Edmonton

Appendix C: Cover Letter for Preliminary Questionnaire

September 18, 1997.

To the Parish Secretary and the coordinator for Marriage Preparation:

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Mona-Lee Feehan and I am currently working on my Masters thesis in the area of marriage preparation within the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton with the support of Archbishop Joseph MacNeil.

The purpose of this request is to obtain information with regard to marriage preparation programs currently offered within our Archdiocese. This information will be used for the purpose of establishing a base from which an investigation will be conducted of the topic or theme areas explored within these programs. It is my hope that the outcome of this project will serve as a basis for recommendations for program topics or themes common to all preparation programs within the Archdiocese. The optimum result would allow our priests to know that all couples entering the Sacrament of Marriage have addressed such issues as suggested by this survey (for example, communication, sexuality, spirituality and sacrament) in their preparation courses. It is not intended that any final recommendations would exclude additional topics or themes which any individual parish may wish to include within their marriage preparation programs.

I ask that the enclosed questionnaire be filled out and returned by fax to Mona-Lee Feehan at the Family Enrichment Center, (465-3003) or by mail (8421-101 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6A 0L1) by October 15, 1997. If you have any questions, comments or concerns in completing this questionnaire, please don't hesitate to contact me at the Family Enrichment Center (469-2323) or at my home (438-6171).

Thank-you very much for your anticipated coopecation.

Yours very truly

Mona-Lee Feehan

Appendix D: Preliminary Questionnaire

MARRIAGE PREPARATION COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE

What is the name of your parish?

_____

Marriage Preparation contact person/couple: name, address, telephone number.

_____

_____

_____

Do you have a marriage preparation program in your parish?

_____

_____

Do your couples participate in the Archdiocesan program through the Family Enrichment Center in Edmonton either by personal attendance or correspondence?

_____

_____

_____

Do you utilize any other marriage preparation program?

_____

_____

_____

If you are currently utilizing a program other than that provided by the Family Enrichment Center, please continue with the questionnaire. If you utilize the Family Enrichment Center program by attendance or correspondence, thank-you for your time. You are not required to complete the rest of this questionnaire.

What marriage preparation course is currently in use in your parish (for example, Evenings for the Engaged, Engaged Encounter, FOCCUS, Sponsor Couple Program, etc.)? If possible, please enclose agenda, summary, outline or leader booklet. _____

Do you present your own program or have you modified an existing program? If so, please describe the program or modifications? If possible, please enclose agenda, summary, outline or leader booklet.

_____

_____

_____

_____

How many evenings or weekends (or both) are involved?

_____

How many hours are involved for each session?

_____

What are the total hours of the program?

_____

What are the major themes or topics involved in this course?

_____

_____

_____

Do you use couple packs or other handouts? Please describe or, if possible, enclose a sample.

_____

_____

_____

What format of presenters do you use (for example, facilitating couples, guest speakers, parish priest, sponsor couples)?

_____

_____

On average, how many couples do you prepare annually? Per course?

_____

How many courses do you offer per year?

_____

If you require more space than has been provided, please feel free to use additional sheets.

Thank-you for your time and cooperation! Please forward your response to:

The Family Enrichment Center 8421-101 Ave. Edmonton, T6A 0L1
or fax to Family Enrichment Center, Mona-Lee Feehan, 465-3003.

Appendix E: Cover Letter for Principal Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study on marriage preparation in the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton. This letter is being sent to you as a delegate in the recent Archdiocesan Synod on the Family. While this correspondence and questionnaire have been approved and supported by Archbishop MacNeil, it is not a product of the Synod Implementation Committee. However, your response may have a positive impact on the "Marriage Preparation recommendation from the Synod on the Family".

I have been involved with marriage preparation for 18 years and am currently completing a Master's degree at the University of Alberta. This project, which is part of my thesis, explores the present status of marriage preparation programs in the Edmonton Archdiocese. It is anticipated that recommendations as a result of this project will assist in developing common themes which will be addressed by all marriage preparation programs within our region.

Your participation is entirely voluntary as well as anonymous. Do not sign your name on the questionnaire. However, information as to your parish will help to ensure all regions within the Archdiocese have a voice. As well, your responses will be held in strictest confidence.

Please return completed questionnaires in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided by **January 31, 1998.** If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at 438-6171 or by e-mail, MFEEHAN6@aol.com. If you would like a summary of the survey results, please notify me either by telephone or e-mail. Thank-you in advance for your time, effort and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Mona-Lee Feehan

Appendix F: Principal Questionnaire

MARRIAGE PREPARATION
IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF EDMONTON

This questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes of your time. Your responses are important to improve marriage preparation programs in our Archdiocese. Please return by Jan. 31, 1998.

1. Please state the name of the parish you attend and the city or town in which it is located (for example, St. Michael's parish, Edmonton or St. Michael's parish, Leduc): _____

2. What is your age category?
___ 1-less than 26 years
___ 2-26-40 years
___ 3-41-50 years
___ 4-51-60 years
___ 5-60+ years

3. What is your current status?
___ 1-single
___ 2-living with a partner
___ 3-married
___ 4-widowed
___ 5-divorced or separated
___ 6-clergy/religious

4. If married, how long have you been married?.
___ 1-less than 6 years
___ 2-6-10 years
___ 3-11-20 years
___ 4-21-30 years
___ 5-more than 30 years

5. Have you ever taken a marriage preparation program?
___ 1-yes
___ 2-no (If no, please skip to question 12.)

6. If you have taken a marriage preparation program, when was it?
___ 1-1995 or later
___ 2-1990 - 1994
___ 3-1980 - 1989
___ 4-1970 - 1979
___ 5-1960 - 1969
___ 6-prior to 1960

7. Check any of the following marriage preparation programs you have attended. (If you attended more than one program, check all that apply.)
___ Engaged Encounter
___ a program within your parish
___ Family Enrichment Center program
___ Catholic Information Center program
___ a central program offered in your region
___ a program sponsored by another faith (for example, Anglican, Baptist,
Lutheran, United)
___ other program (specify): _____
___ I don't remember the name of the program.

8. Check the reasons for taking a marriage preparation program:
___ It was required.
___ I was interested.
___ My fiancé wanted to take the course.
___ Other (specify): _____

9. If you have taken a marriage preparation course, did you find it:
___ 1-very helpful
___ 2-helpful
___ 3-no opinion
___ 4-unhelpful
___ 5-very unhelpful

10. If you found the program helpful or very helpful, was the information useful or relevant (check all that apply):
___ during the course and immediately following
___ within the first two years of marriage
___ some time after the second year of marriage
___ no opinion or unhelpful

11. Can you identify one or more topics or themes that were helpful?
___ no
___ yes (specify):_____
_____
_____

12. Are you currently enrolled in a marriage preparation program?
___ no
___ yes

13. Are you currently or have you ever been a presenter, facilitator or organizer of a marriage preparation program?
___ no
___ yes

14. This question is a two-part question.
Part a): Check, in no particular order, what you believe to be the five most important topics or themes that should be included in all marriage preparation programs.
Part b): Indicate your level of agreement as to whether each of the topics or themes should be included in all marriage programs. Use the following key to answer part b):

SA=strongly agree, A=agree, U=unsure, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

a) Please check only five.	b) Should this topic be included in marriage preparation programs? Please mark all topics.				
	1	2	3	4	5
___ communication	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ intimacy	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ anger management	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ problems in marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ marital or family violence	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ legal issues in marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ defining love	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ the wedding ceremony	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ sacrament of marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ theology of marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ God in marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ expectations of marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ our differences	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ conflict resolution	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ sexuality	SA	A	U	D	SD

___ roles in marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ spirituality	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ leisure activities	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ finances	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ starting a family	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ parenting (blended families)	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ bible study	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ extended family (in-laws)	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ interchurch marriage	SA	A	U	D	SD
___ dual career lifestyles	SA	A	U	D	SD

15. Are there other themes or topics that should be included that are not listed in Question 14?

___ no
___ yes (specify):_____

16. At what point should an Archdiocesan or church sponsored marriage preparation program begin?

___ 1-junior high school or earlier
___ 2-high school
___ 3-at the time of engagement
___ 4-just prior to marriage

17. In your opinion, what is the best format for a marriage preparation program?

___ 1-one week-end program (Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday all day)
___ 2-two week-ends (Friday evening and Saturday all day both weekends)
___ 3-once a week for 6 - 10 weeks
___ 4-a combination of 2 - 4 evenings plus a week-end (Fri., Sat. and Sun.)
___ 5-a combination of 2 - 4 evenings plus two week-ends (Fri. and Sat. only)

18. For a program offered weekly, what would be the best time of the week? Please check three choices.

___Monday, pm
___Tuesday, pm
___Wednesday, pm
___Thursday, pm
___Friday, pm
___Saturday, am
___Saturday, afternoon
___Sunday, am
___Sunday, afternoon

19. What types of instructional activities are best suited to your needs? (How do you learn best?)

___ 1-lectures
___ 2-small group discussions
___ 3-reading and answering questions
___ 4-a combination of any of the above (specify):_____
___ 5-other (specify): _____

20. Should there be ongoing support in the form of a program after marriage?

___ No
___ Yes (If "yes", please elaborate.) _____
_____

Please return completed questionnaires by January 31, 1998 to Mona-Lee Feehan, 10638-25A Ave., Edmonton, Alta., T6J 4K3, Thank-you very much for your assistance in this project.